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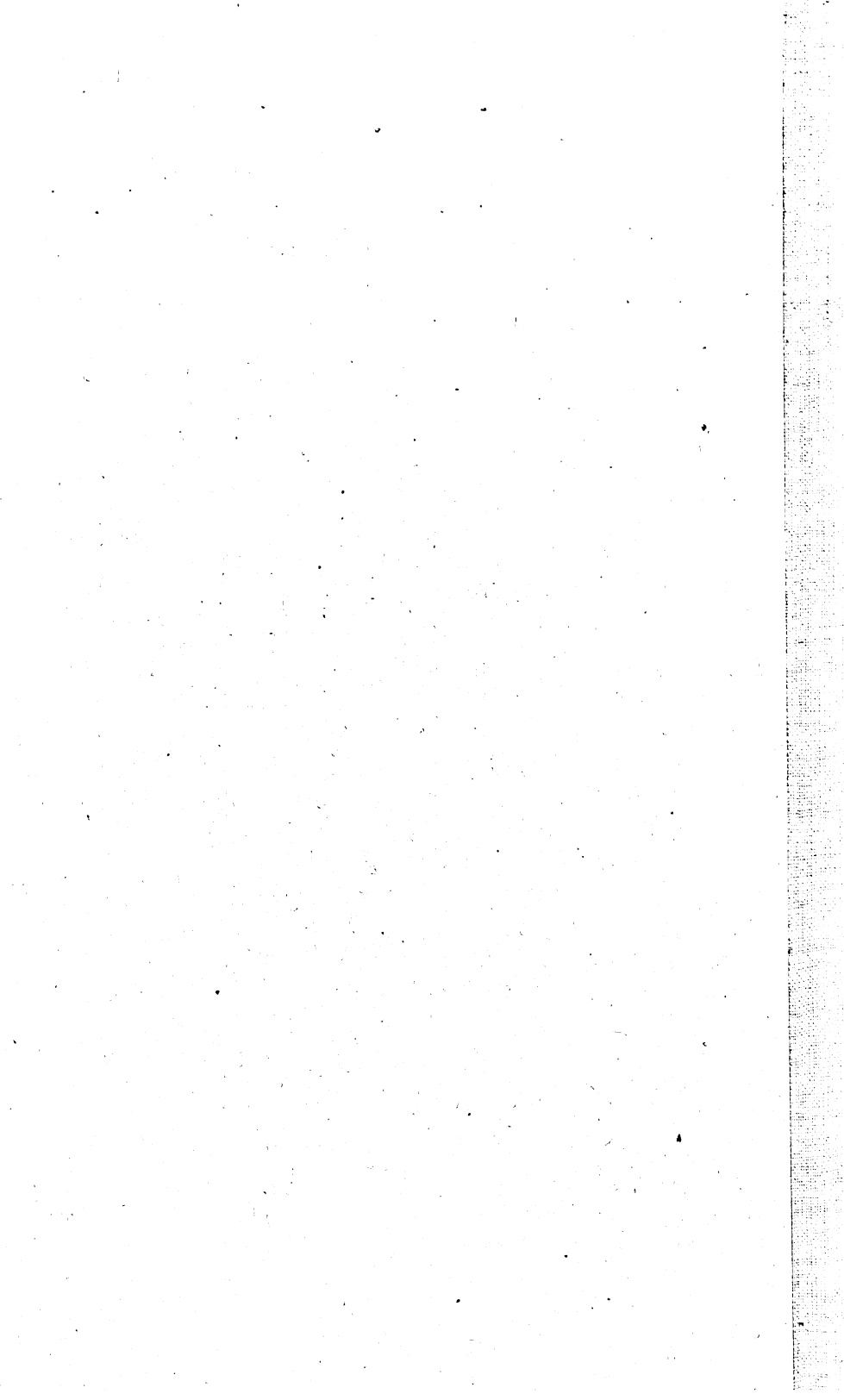
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“Miss Mary,” she said abruptly, “what be ye doin’ wi’ that cousin o’ yours?”

ROOKSTONE.

B

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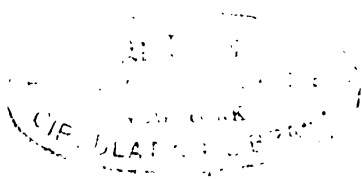
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ROOKSTONE.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

ROOKSTONE PARK.

THERE had always been Wolfersons at Rookstone Park. There had never been any notability in the family, or any marrying among the young folk for position or title, but for old blood and unspotted fame you might search England over and find no family purer or truer than the Wolfersons.

The present squire had succeeded his maternal grandfather in the property, and as the estate had been carefully managed during his long minority, he found himself a richer man than many of his more immediate predecessors.

It seemed so far that Christopher Wolferson's lot in life was a singularly happy one. He had married, when very young, the woman he loved: he had two charming daughters, both nearly grown up, and about eight years ago his dearest wish had been fulfilled by the birth of a son and heir.

A good landlord and a most tender husband and father, all his friends and neighbors said that the owner of Rookstone deserved this unceasing tide of prosperity, he made such good use of it. He might be slightly vacillating, a little inclined to act on impulse, but he had done much for the welfare of others. His village schools were the best built and endowed in the county, and lately he had been planning the erection of almshouses for old and impoverished folk belonging to the neighborhood.

This afternoon he and his wife were looking over some drawings which had been sent in by the builder.

"Would you put Kitty Robbins in one

of the almshouses?" said Mrs. Wolferson.

"Old Kitty! Why, Amy, I believe it would break her heart if I turned her out of the lodge. No, I'll do this: if you like, I'll make the lodge and the garden it stands in her own as long as she lives, so that in case my life drops before hers, and Christy takes a dislike to her, she may be safe."

"Christopher! how could Kitty outlive you? she must be sixty-five at least."

"Well, I think she's older. She had a grown-up daughter who died when I was a child; but then these sort of women are grown up when they are sixteen, and I believe Kitty wasn't older than that herself when she married. But I think we owe the old woman something for the devotion she has always shown to us, though she is such an old crab."

"Is she? She is eccentric and rather proud in her ways, but she is always civil to me and the girls."

"You should hear Richard speak of her. I expect he won't approve of this gift of mine."

A cloud came over his wife's sweet face: "I sometimes wish Richard had stayed in America."

"Why do you wish that, Amy?"

Mrs. Wolferson looked at her husband. There was almost a mischievous smile on his happy, genial mouth, and it puzzled her. It was painful to her even to allude to a matter on which she did not think as he did, for something told her that he had guessed the cause of her perplexity, and made light of it. She got up from her chair, and, going to her husband, put her arms round his

neck: "I believe you know my reason already, Christopher. It is for Mary's sake I shrink from Richard."

Mr. Wolferston took her hand, but he still smiled in the same easy, amused fashion: "Why should you shrink if Mary does not? I think she likes Richard. Now, don't sigh, Amy: do you know that I shall think her very lucky if he cares about her?"

"He loves her, I am sure of it; but Mary is such a child still—not seventeen, remember. I think—" She paused to gather courage, for what she had yet to say needed an effort.

"What do you think, my pet?" he said, kindly, for he saw the struggle in her face.

"I think that if you were to invite Richard less often to Rookstone, Mary and he might scarcely ever meet; and if this were managed carefully she would soon forget any slight impression he may have made on her fancy."

"And Richard? You have no regard for his feelings, then, supposing them to be what you suspect. You women only think of your own side of the question, Amy. Remember you were but eighteen yourself when you married, and Janet was younger when she engaged herself to Wenlock."

"I had better be quite candid, for I know you guess my reason, although you will not perhaps see its force as I do. I would rather have Mary made unhappy even by this separation than see her married to Richard. When he arrived in England you told me that his strange, free-thinking notions were merely the result of his colonial habits—that he had often lived so cut off from human beings that he had grown careless about even the outward forms of life. I made allowance, and waited. But more than a year has gone by, darling, and I see no change: he still takes every opportunity of scoffing at what he calls cant. Honestly, I often wonder at the sympathy you seem to find with a man so totally unlike yourself, so unlike any Wolferstons that I ever heard of."

She had made her husband look grave at last, and gravity was a very rare ex-

pression on his pleasant, handsome face: there was regret, too. His wife's words had awakened a sharp feeling of self-reproach. "I take some blame on my own shoulders," he said, after a short silence. "Perhaps if I had spoken to Richard he might have been led to think of things more seriously. But, my darling, you must remember that he has had no advantages: his mother was an Italian—a singer, I believe. What should I have been without your influence, Amy? and why may we not hope that Mary will do as much for Richard?"

His wife protested against this view of the case. Mary was so young and childish that Richard would be far more likely to mould her to his own opinions and habits. "If it were Janet, it would be quite different."

"Well, well"—the gravity of the conversation had exhausted his patience—"we won't discuss it any longer, dearest. Mary is of course too young to marry at present. But I think you are prejudiced, and we owe a far heavier debt than you are aware of to Richard. I wish now I had told you of it before, but I never knew quite the right story until he came over to England, and then he asked me to keep it quiet, so as not to revive the remembrance of his father's disgrace. I think you ought to know it, though, and if I get the opportunity I shall ask him to-night to release me from my promise of secrecy."

"I did not know you expected him."

"Yes: I forgot to tell you. He is coming down on business." He looked at his watch. "In fact, I thought he would have been here by this time."

CHAPTER II.

RICHARD WOLFERSTON.

THE sun was setting as Richard Wolferston passed through the gate beside the keeper's lodge. The red may tree in the little garden served as a focus for "last gleams:" it was intensely crimson in its full-blossomed beauty. But once through the gates, the tall trees intercepted the level sunlight, and the day looked at least an hour darker. The

candelabra-like blossoms on the horse-chestnuts stood out almost ghastly against their now sombre leaves.

The gate clicked in shutting, and the keeper's mother, old Kitty Robbins, came out into the little garden and looked after the visitor with a frown on her old brown face.

Farther on was a large clearing where several of the grassed rides that intersected the park met, some of them dark alleys full of mysterious shadow. Along that which ran westward the light still glinted, spangling the leaves here and there, and those so specially singled out burned with intense radiance.

Richard Wolferston's pale face glowed too as the distant light traveled to it, and the unusual tinge gave him a look of fire and energy. His ordinary expression was languid, almost indolent. He was a well-grown, handsome man, with singularly large, dark, dreamy eyes: these seemed to flash back the red western light angrily, and then he looked round him at the stately growth of trees.

He was thinking deeply as he made his way through the park, silent now except for the occasional cry of the nightjar or the sheep-bell's monotonous tinkle, or perhaps the whirr of a stag-beetle almost in his face. His thoughts went on in this fashion: "Another long minority—nothing would surprise me less: young Christopher cannot be more than eight years old, and his father—well, I imagine Christopher to be about forty; but the Wolferstons never make old bones. To think that all this may lie waste for years!" He sighed, and then walked on impatiently.

Near the house the trees were no longer in dense masses: they stood in twos and threes, well chosen both for form and color, and grouped harmoniously in the foreground of the picture which the distant country offered from the windows. It was a long, low house, with two widely stretching wings. Along the centre ran a terrace, with gray, worn stone balustrades on a red wall. On this, as Richard approached, two peacocks stood, stiff as if carved and then

painted to imitate life. But when he reached the flower-garden beneath the terrace, one of the birds flew away, with its shrill, ungainly scream, and the other soon followed, dropping a feather almost at his feet.

The sun had sunk quite out of sight: the red memory of him even had been replaced by the exquisite chrysolite hue one sees only at that hour—a time which speaks of peace and rest, soothing the perturbed soul by its infinite solemnity, and bidding the wearied body rejoice that the close of outdoor labor is come.

Richard Wolferston stood a minute gazing at the soft green sky: then he turned and mounted the steps. He had recovered all his easy indifference, and sauntered on toward the open windows of the saloon, balancing the peacock's feather on his finger. He had often seen the room before, and yet he stood looking in, before he entered, with keen admiration. Richard Wolferston loved the beautiful in nature and in art, but he preferred it in the latter; and there was so much in the arrangement of this sitting-room of Mrs. Wolferston's to give pleasure to the eye that it would have been wonderful if he had taken no heed of it. The saloon, as it was called, was a long room stretching almost the length of the terrace, with a huge fireplace at each end: a double row of four marble columns supported the two centre beams, wide enough apart to make another little room between them. All along the walls ran soft-cushioned divans covered with some dark blue woolen texture, and mounted in black carved wood, evidently Indian by its lightness and grotesque perforations. The walls showed a few choice pictures, chiefly in water-colors. But it was nothing in detail that caught Richard Wolferston's eye. It was the harmonious grouping of fresh flowers in simple crystal vases beside antique bronzes, of a straw work-basket on the table at the farther end of the saloon with the cabinet of cameos close by, and the *étagère*, filled with Chelsea and Dresden and Sèvres and Limoges, and here and there a rare, highly-prized specimen of Henri

Deux porcelain. The Chelsea Venuses and the bronze bull were equally at home in that pleasant, well-stored saloon—so well stored that you might have spent more than one day in it before you discovered all that it contained to delight eyes and heart alike.

He tapped playfully at the window and went in.

There was a likeness between the cousins as they shook hands—a likeness of features, but not of complexion, for Christopher was fair-haired, and his eyes were more brown than black: the one face, too, although it showed the same indolence, had not a trace of discontent.

"I had almost given you up, Dick."

"The train was late, and I loitered coming through the park. How are you?"

This to Mrs. Wolferston. Though she was his cousin's wife, he had not yet learned to call her by her name. He liked her—better, perhaps, than he usually liked people, for he was cynical about the good qualities of others—but he seemed never to attain the intimate footing at Rookstone which would have set him quite at ease with its mistress. Looking at the sweet, fragile face, it seemed impossible that a loving heart did not belong to Amy Wolferston, but Richard had begun to doubt this after a year's acquaintance; and Mrs. Wolferston's greeting was so cold this evening that it was a relief when his cousin asked Richard to come into his writing-room.

Mrs. Wolferston sat some time after the gentlemen had left her, perplexed and anxious. Putting the objection she had urged against Richard on one side, she had another cause for anxiety. Mr. Painson, the old family lawyer, had taken offence, about two months ago, at the deference the squire of Rookstone showed to his new-found cousin's opinion, and had begged him to seek another adviser. Mrs. Wolferston knew that her husband secretly regretted this estrangement, and also that he thought his cousin had been haughty and unconciliating in the tone he had taken in differing from Mr. Painson. The cause

of quarrel had been a mere trifle—the most advantageous way of leasing some farms which Mr. Wolferston had recently added to his property.

Richard Wolferston had been brought up to the law, and when Mr. Painson sent in his resignation the squire placed his papers and affairs in his cousin's keeping.

"I suppose Christopher is right and I am prejudiced," Amy Wolferston said to herself. "Richard must be quite thirty-five, old enough to manage business, if he is ever to manage it; clever, too, and certainly a person one feels inclined to like and consult; and yet I feel as if the property was no longer so safe under his management as with dear old Mr. Painson: he was often cross and fidgety, and not half so agreeable, but I wish he were still Christopher's adviser."

She went to the window that opened on to the terrace. There in the distance were her three children—Mary and Christopher running races, Janet walking slowly some little way behind. The sight cleared away Mrs. Wolferston's perplexity. "What is coming to me," she said, "that I should begin to doubt or despond? Surely no woman was ever so blessed as I am, with such a husband and such children; and why should I fear, for Christopher is better and wiser in every way than I am? Even if this foreboding that weighs on my spirits be a presage of evil, no efforts of mine can ward it off. I am forgetting the very precepts I teach my children, that all vexations and troubles, however small, are sent us."

She passed out on to the terrace to meet the group. They were close to the spot where Richard had stooped to pick up the peacock's feather. Mary, a tall, lovely girl, with her father's fair hair and soft, sweet brown eyes, was flushed and panting from her heedless racing, and little Christy's cherub face was scarlet and his golden curls all disordered.

"How you have heated yourselves!" said their mother: "come in and keep quiet, Mary."

"Tell us something first, do, please."

Christy had got both hands clasped round his mother's arm, and was squeezing it with a mixture of affection and eagerness that compelled her to stop and listen.

"Is Richard here, darling? Mary declared she saw him go up the terrace steps as we stood among the trees there, below the lake."

Mrs. Wolferston glanced involuntarily at her youngest daughter. She had been standing quite still, and yet the flush on her cheeks had deepened. Her mother sighed: she turned to Christy: "Yes, he has just come, but you cannot go to him—he is in the study with papa."

"I know, I know: it's a secret, but I know what it's about," and the wild little fellow let go his mother's arm and ran round and round her in his glee.

"Hush, Christy," said Janet: "you are talking nonsense about a secret. You ought not to repeat anything you hear papa say by chance."

Janet Wolferston was scarcely nineteen, but she had quite the manner and the authority of a much older person with her brother and sister. Strangers called her strong-minded and eccentric, but her mother, although she might sometimes regret the sternness of her eldest child's rebukes, respected the motive which she knew prompted them. Janet had never been so great a favorite with her father as either Mary or Christy, and thus had escaped the systematic spoiling they received at his hands. Reproof was intolerable to Mr. Wolferston's facile, sweet temper, and he found it pleasanter and easier to yield entirely to these young wills than to thwart them. In appearance, Janet was unlike either of her parents. Her hair and complexion were neither fair nor dark, though the latter had the bloom of Hebe: her eyes were bright and large, and of the darkest blue. Richard Wolferston said they were the eyes of a Diana, and the severe aquiline profile and firmly-cut lips confirmed this idea at first sight, though Janet Wolferston was not cold-looking; but Richard had taken a dislike to her from the beginning, and he

encouraged little Christy in mutinous behavior to his eldest sister.

"You are very clever, Janet," the child said, mischievously, "but you don't know a bit what I mean."

"Hush, Christy," his mother began; but he was hugging her arm again, and holding his fair, flushed face up to be kissed.

"It's only this," he said, too low for any one but his mother to hear: "Richard has come to-day to do something to papa's will. I heard them settling it just before he went away. I only said it was a secret to tease Janet, for they both knew I was close by, and papa took no notice."

CHAPTER III.

RICHARD WOLFERSTON TAKES OFFENCE.

A WEEK had gone by, and the subject of Richard Wolferston's visits at Rookstone had not been mentioned between the husband and wife. It was such a very rare circumstance for Amy to differ from her husband that she felt it must be a long time before she could get courage to renew the discussion.

She was sitting by herself: her husband was out riding with his daughters, and Richard Wolferston was announced. He thought her manner more formal than ever, and it irritated him. Buffeting with the world may brace a man's energies, but it seldom sweetens his temper, and Richard Wolferston had had a hard struggle to gratify his extravagant tastes ever since boyhood. He asked for the girls, and her cold, almost indifferent answer stung him beyond endurance. His pale face flushed: "I am afraid, Mrs. Wolferston, I have been so unfortunate as to offend you, or that I am no longer welcome at Rookstone."

He laid a stress on the name, to remind her of his claim of kindred.

She flushed too, but she did not answer at once. It seemed to her that as he had given her this opening, it might be well to speak frankly to him about Mary. The impulse was strong, and she yielded to it: "You have not offend-

ed me, but you are right in thinking that I do not welcome you to Rookstone."

"I scarcely understand such a nice distinction."

"Shall I be quite frank with you, then? and if I offend you will you believe that I do so without intention?"

He bowed, but he looked cynical. If Amy Wolferston had known how little belief he had in her sincerity at that moment, she would not have been so confiding.

"It seems to me"—she stopped, and then went on hurriedly, plunging into what was so difficult to approach by degrees—"that you admire our youngest daughter." She looked at him: every trace of color had left his face, but he made no attempt to answer her. "She—she is very young, perhaps you do not know how young—she is not quite seventeen: in mind she is quite a child still;" she remembered Mary's blush, and she faltered: "I should be very sorry to have her otherwise for a year or two longer." Still no answer, only his head rather more erect and his lips tightly closed. "Now you understand why—why—I may enjoy your society very much, and yet be unwilling to expose her to the risk of seeing you so constantly while you feel as you do toward her. You have not contradicted me, therefore I venture to think I have guessed rightly. Girls of Mary's age are not as quickly won as when their feelings are more fully developed, but constant association would be painful and unsafe for both of you, and I really wish to save you pain, too, Mr. Wolferston."

"Thank you." He bowed deeply as he rose. "I give you credit for the best possible intentions"—his lip curled with scorn at what he considered her mercenary views—"and you are quite right, doubtless, in thinking Mary far too beautiful to throw away on a poor, struggling lawyer. You have taught me my place, Mrs. Wolferston, and I thank you for the lesson. Poor relations, you know, are apt to forget themselves. I had meant to ask your husband's permission to—to admire Mary, as you say: now I

will refrain." His tone was so bitter that she saw he was deeply wounded. Before she had made up her mind how to answer him, he spoke again in his usual voice: "I will wait in the study till Christopher comes in: I have something to do to the papers I have brought." He left the room.

Mrs. Wolferston felt very dissatisfied. It would have been better to tell Richard the true cause of her objection to him. She had let him go away under a false impression, but he was so very angry that explanation would probably have been useless.

She thought for some time longer, and then decided to consult her husband and ask his permission to write frankly and fully to Richard Wolferston. She feared that Christopher would disapprove her having broached the subject at all. She could give herself no reason for having spoken: it had been an irresistible impulse, and it had only made matters worse. It might keep Richard away from Rookstone, but it was very painful to feel that she had made an enemy of her husband's most intimate friend.

She must see Christopher before he met Richard. He would be sure to come in through the saloon, and she could tell him in a few words all that had happened.

If she could have known the mischief her words were working she would at once have followed Richard Wolferston into the study and have braved his anger.

CHAPTER IV.

FORESHADOWINGS.

THE door opened, and Mrs. Wolferston started up, but it was only Newman the butler:

"If you please, ma'am, old Kitty from the lodge has slipped down just now coming into the court, and Mrs. Knight's afraid she's sprained her ankle."

"Where is she?"

"In the housekeeper's room, ma'am. Mrs. Knight thought you might quiet her perhaps, for the poor old creature will have it her leg's broken. She seems in awful pain."

"Poor thing!" and Kitty Robbins' sufferings put to flight all Mrs. Wolferston's anxieties. She was soon kneeling beside the old woman and examining the injury.

"Now dwoant'ee, dwoant'ee touch I." Kitty pushed away the soft white hand with her brown, hard-working fingers. "For pity's sake, dwoant, Madam Wolferston: ee may be as soft as feathers, but feathers 'ud rasp, I know. Oh dear! oh dear! The ways o' Providence goes crook'd attimes, I be a-thinkin'. There'll be that gipsy hussy at the toll-house, as never does naught for her livin', with both her legs safe and sound, and no use for 'em; and here be I, with use enow for six, clean robbed o' the best of 'em. Ah! it be no use talking. I know—I hanna lived sixty years to be told and taught about my own bones and j'int's, Mrs. Knight."

This was in answer to the housekeeper's assurance that her bones were uninjured.

Mrs. Wolferston asked if the doctor had been sent for, and finding this had not been thought necessary, she gave orders that a messenger should at once be despatched, for she saw that no meaner decision would have weight with Kitty.

"Tellin' I as it beant broke"—the old woman's indignation got loose as soon as the housekeeper had gone with her mistress's message—"when it yachs all the way up to the knee-j'int. Weary me! there be folks as knows th' extent o' other people's pains a deal better than th' extent o' they appetites."

Mrs. Wolferston petted and soothed the poor old woman, and bid the housekeeper summon her again when the doctor came.

As Mrs. Wolferston crossed the hall, on her way back to the saloon, she met Janet: "Where is your father?"

"Richard's here, and papa is in the study with him."

Then she had lost her chance of speaking to her husband, and, having lost it, it would perhaps be better not to mention what had happened till after his cousin went away, for she guessed that

she should scarcely see the squire for a minute before the dinner-bell rang. The little interview with old Kitty had calmed her. She began to think that Richard Wolferston would see he had been unjust and hasty.

His manner at dinner-time puzzled her. There was an uneasy restlessness she had never before noticed in him. In answer to his cousin's invitation, he said he could not sleep at Rookstone—he had an early appointment in London.

"But you will get home in the middle of the night."

"Not quite so bad," he said, with a forced laugh. "A train leaves Purley station at ten: I shall be safe in chambers by half-past one o'clock. But, I say, Christopher, we had better finish off that business-to-night."

The two gentlemen spent the rest of the evening in the study. The bell was rung more than once.

Mrs. Wolferston and her daughters were sitting in the library, a cozy room, walled, except on the window side, with oak bookcases. The very door was concealed by sham books, so that when it was closed a stranger might have looked vainly for means of egress. Mrs. Wolferston was busy with needlework, Janet was reading, and Mary, having idled away the first part of the evening in play with her favorite dog Loulou, discovered that she had left her embroidery in the saloon. She came back with it, laughing: "What can papa and Richard have to say to those two men? I saw John, the new groom, and that young gardener, Kitty's nephew, going into the study."

"Mary, how curious you are!" said Janet, indignantly.

"People are sometimes wanted to write their names as witnesses, dear; and those are chosen who are the least interested in the papers they have to sign."

Ten o'clock struck, but the gentlemen did not come into the library.

"I suppose they will finish the evening there," Mary said in a vexed tone.

Mrs. Wolferston rang the bell.

"If you please, ma'am, master said I was to tell you he had driven Mr. Rich-

ard over to the station, and he hoped you would not stay up for him," said the butler.

Mrs. Wolferston sent the girls off to bed. She went up stairs herself, but she could not stay there: she felt too restless. The evening had been oppressive, and the saloon windows were still unclosed. She passed through the centre one on to the terrace. There was no moon, not even a star: the sky was almost awful in its vast darkness. Just then the stable clock rang out eleven in a shrill, clanging tone, as if it was telling the household it ought to be in bed. "I wonder what keeps Christopher?" she thought: "it is only half an hour's drive from the station." Still she paced up and down. A nightingale, far off in the woods, began to trill out his marvelous gurgle of sweet sounds, but they did not soothe her. Her hearing was so intently strained to catch the first sound of returning wheels that even the nightingale's song came as an unwelcome distraction. She had left the saloon in darkness—now she saw a light moving in it. It was only Newman come to close the windows.

"You can leave the centre one open," said his mistress: "I can close that. I shall stay here till your master returns. Is he not very late?"

"Yes, ma'am; only, this being the first of the month, we haven't got the new train-book yet, and Mr. Richard's train may go later now; and master would wait to see him off, ma'am."

This was said to soothe his mistress: the man was himself growing anxious at the delay.

Speaking out one's fears often relieves them, and when Amy Wolferston stepped on the terrace again her heart felt less heavy. How kind and good and unselfish her husband was! She believed that he had been at the trouble of driving his cousin over to Purley to please her. He would not press him to stay because she had asked him not to encourage Richard at Rookstone, and yet he would dismiss him so courteously that Richard could not take offence. Why should not his words come true—why should not his cousin be brought

to a better, less worldly life if Christopher bent his mind to the task of influencing him? "Then I could give him Mary joyfully," she said; "but I cannot believe it would be right to expose the child to Richard Wolferston's influence in order that she might benefit him. It would be doing evil that good might come."

Again a light in the saloon. She had not heard the wheels, but it might be her husband. The wind was rising among the trees, and amid the creaking and swaying of their giant arms other sounds were scarcely heard.

Newman came out on the terrace to speak to her before she reached the window. She could not see the man's face, but his voice sounded strangely: "It's half-past eleven now, ma'am. Should I go out along the Purley road and see if I can meet master?"

All the foreboding, all the nameless terror that had lately weighed on her, and which she had so bravely struggled with, thronged back suddenly as the man spoke. "Yes, Newman. I wish we had gone sooner. You and John can go with me, and let some of the other men follow us with lights."

Before the butler had got back into the hall with a lantern, his mistress stood there wrapped in a large cloak, the hood drawn over her head.

"You won't go yourself, ma'am?" he said, respectfully. "You'll take cold, ma'am, and perhaps—"

"Open the door," she said, in a more decided voice than he had ever heard from her. "You had better lead the way with your lantern, Newman, it is so dark." It was as dark as it could be—that impenetrable, immeasurable inkiness that makes one fearful where each footstep may lead. At another time Amy Wolferston would scarcely have dared to walk unguided in such blind fashion, but now she hurried on, helped by the glimmer of the butler's lantern, a faint help against the dense gloom. "You have told the men to bring lights, have you not?" she said: "we can see nothing distinctly by this lantern."

"Yes, ma'am: there are some torches

at the keeper's cottage, and I told them to wake up Jem Robbins and bring him along."

They had left the park behind them, and were in the high road leading to Purley.

"What is this?" she exclaimed, as her arm struck against something hard which seemed to be in the middle of the road.

Newman raised the lantern.

"It's the toll-gate," said the other man who accompanied them. "Molly must know if the master has passed through yet. Halloo, Molly! Molly, wake up, I say!"

They knocked long and vigorously before any signs of stirring were heard in the toll-house. At last an upper window was unclosed: "What d'ye mean by such a caddle at this time o' night?"

"It's me, Molly—Mrs. Wolferston. Has the master gone through the toll to-night?"

"Then be off wi' ye! ye're an impudent baggage. Ye'll not be tellin' o' I that a real lady born, like madam at the park yonder, 'ud be coming out in the high road 'twixt night and morning, rousing honest folk from their lawful rest."

"Let me speak to her, ma'am," said Newman: "she's only half awake, and doesn't know what she's about. Look here, Molly, my girl, and look sharp, too. You remember the master driving by here in his new dog-cart this evening, rather before ten, don't you now?"

"And what then? The master have a right to go where he choose, without folks a-spyin' after he and his ways. It's like I should see whether a dog-cart's old or new, and the night so dark I can't see my own hand! It were the master, though, for he said, 'Good-night, Molly.'"

"We're losing time," Mrs. Wolferston said, in an imploring, eager tone to Newman: "she can tell us nothing."

"And you're sure he hasn't been back?"

"I shouldn't talk of his going if he'd come back too—should I, ye dunder-head?"

"Well, then, lend us your lantern,

quick, like a good lass, for we're afraid something's gone wrong."

It was terrible to Amy to hear her own sickening fear put into words as a certainty. She could not stand still while the sleepy, unwilling woman groped about for her lantern. She hurried on alone in the darkness, and, feeling for the little swing gate, passed through it before Newman and John were ready to follow her.

CHAPTER V.

A DARK NIGHT'S WORK.

ON the other side of the gate, alone in the utter darkness, Amy's courage failed. What was this horror that had come upon her? Christopher, her husband—it was impossible that anything should have happened to him.

"Christopher!" but her words seemed choked and muffled by the darkness: they fell back on her tongue and palsied it for a moment. The inner darkness was worse than that without, and then her heart was lifted up from that crushing despair, and she clasped her hands together and prayed for help and guidance in this her sore need.

As she turned to listen for her companions' footsteps, she saw the welcome sight of lights a little distance off: the men from the gamekeeper's cottage had made good speed, and would soon join them.

But Newman and John were through the gate. Molly's lantern gave a better light, and they went on faster.

The two men whispered together every now and then softly, but their mistress could not speak—she dared not even think: she was trying her utmost to keep calm and self-possessed, for a new dread had flashed into her mind.

Newman came up to her, even in that moment of fear and doubt touching his hat with his customary respect: "I don't see how there can be any accident, ma'am. If there'd been one, the horse and dog-cart would have come home, unless—"

He was surprised at his mistress's calm answer: "You are thinking Mr.

Wolferston has taken the lower road from the station, by the mill-pond. I think so, too. We had better stand still till the men join us, for we must be getting near the angle where the roads separate. As soon as they come up, make them light all the torches: then let John and a couple of them go to the station along the regular road—the others can follow you and me."

The man repeated her orders mechanically as the rest joined them a few minutes afterward. The mill-pond!—a thought, so Newman said to himself, to make a man feel sick and giddy, much less a delicate woman like his mistress.

It was a large, deep pool, encroaching far on the road, which was specially narrow at this spot, as the footpath was raised several feet above its level.

"Surely, although it is so much the nearest way, the squire would not have run such a risk on such a night as this is. Suppose he's gone to town with Mr. Richard, after all? He certainly said mistress was not to wait up for him; and yet he never did a thing like this before."

Mrs. Wolferston still kept at the head of the party. The next turn of the road she thought must bring them to the mill-pond, but in the darkness she felt uncertain. Suddenly she called out, in a high, unnatural voice, "Torches! bring them forward here."

She could not have told why she uttered that cry: she could not have described the chill horror that came with it; but it was no sudden shock or terror, when the red, smoky glare shed a broad light round the spot on which she stood, to see a dark form stretched across her very path, and to know before she looked that the white, upturned face was her husband's.

The red glare reflected brightly in the deep, quiet water of the pond. It was close beside its edge that the squire had fallen. His wife knelt down quickly beside him and loosened his collar: then she bent down her ear to listen, but all was still. She kissed his forehead gently, as if she feared to wake him. Till now she had acted as we act in a dream—moved and acted without sense or

feeling; but the icy chill that met her lips pierced through the stupor that had benumbed her: she gave a deep gasping sob and sank down beside her husband.

While Newman was busy sending men off in different directions for the doctor, for the means of conveying the squire's body and his almost lifeless wife to the park, some of the others were searching for the missing horse and dog-cart. The last was soon found on the farther side of the pond, more than half under water, and broken, but of the horse there were no traces—none, at least, discoverable in the darkness. He might be lying at the bottom of the pond, strangled in his attempts to free himself, or he might be rushing wildly about the country, maddened by the terror he had undergone.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. WOLFERSTON'S WILL.

NEXT morning the sun came streaming in through the windows as if nothing had happened overnight to make his presence unwelcome at Rookstone.

The blinds had been drawn down, but still the bright light forced its way in—into the bedroom up stairs, where Mary lay sobbing hysterically on her bed, deaf to Janet's tender, soothing words and entreaties to calm herself for their dear mother's sake—into the nursery, where little Christopher sat, his cherub face stiffened into an unnatural seriousness more at the solemn stillness that reigned everywhere than because he as yet realized his loss.

But it was in the death-chamber below that the warm, cheerful sunbeams were most unwelcome. The master of Rookstone had been borne into a seldom-used room leading off from the entrance-hall, called the small library, and here his wife had taken her place beside him. Janet had stolen in once or twice during the night, but she felt that her mother's sorrow was too sacred to be intruded on. It had come with such a sudden sharpness that she could not believe in it. With her head bent slightly, listening

as intently as she had listened the night before for the carriage wheels, Amy Wolferston sat, almost as still as the rigid form beside her, except that every now and then she gently raised the covering Janet had placed over the face of the dead. Then the wistful yearning of her sad eyes told that all hope was not over within her.

But as the day wore on hope fled, and at last when Janet came and urged her to take some rest, she yielded, and suffered herself to be led away. Even then she said, softly, "You will not leave him, darling? We could not leave him alone."

At her room door she saw little Christopher seated on the mat. He jumped up and ran to her: "Nurse says I am to keep away from you, darling, am I? You want your own little Chris, don't you, poor, pretty mamma?"

As the little arms clung fondly round her the forced calm gave way. She buried her face among the child's golden curls and wept passionately: then she drew him into her room, and, closing the door, clasped him in her arms with a vehemence which startled him, it was so unlike his sweet, gentle mother. But the relief to pent-up feeling did her good. When Janet came to her, about two hours later, alarmed by Christopher's terrified account of the way "mamma cried," she found her with swollen eyelids, sadly worn and exhausted, but more really calm and rested than she could have expected.

Next morning it seemed to Janet that her mother had grown years older. She had dressed herself in black: her beautiful hair was strained completely away from her face, and gathered in a simple knot behind.

And Amy Wolferston felt years older. It seemed to her as if she had lost half of her self, the moving spring of her life, the sun which had cheered and lighted her every thought and action. But she did not give way to sullen or uncontrolled sorrow.

Sorrow she must. While the wound was still so acute there was no use in trying to heal it, but she strove humbly

and patiently to see God's hand in it, and not to rebel. Meanwhile, Mary resisted all Janet's attempts to tranquilize her: "You have no feeling, Janet: strong-minded women never have, and they think others give way just because they have deeper feelings. If you had loved darling papa as I did—" And here the poor child burst into a fresh fit of sobbing and flung herself on her bed, resolved not to be comforted.

Janet had borne up bravely, and she had striven hard to keep the knowledge of Mary's state from her mother, but on this second day Mrs. Wolferston asked for her, and her sister was obliged to tell the truth.

Mrs. Wolferston put little Christopher off her lap and went to her daughter's room. Mary lay on the bed, still sobbing. Her mother wept with her at first, and then reasoned, but when she found that Mary made no effort at self-control, she grew anxious. "My dear child," she said, "do you think your father is pleased that you give way to such violent grief? Little Christopher said to me just now, 'I must be always good, mamma, for you know he can always see me now, and he used not to when I was in the nursery.'" But Mary was only quieted for a moment: she soon burst into violent grief.

It was strange to see the different effect that this trial had on the two sisters. On the quick-tempered, energetic Janet it seemed to have laid a softening, chastening hand. Her gentleness with all was wonderful, and her tenderness tried to save her mother even the trouble of thinking for herself. The slight, erect figure glided noiselessly about the house, giving directions and transacting business that might have been thought too serious for her age. On Mary, the sunbeam of the family, the bright, lovely darling who had cheered all hearts by her saucy, winning ways, the effect had been entirely opposite. She alternated between long, desponding fits of silence and sudden bursts of forced cheerfulness, which usually ended in hysterical sobs.

Poor Janet! In the midst of her sor-

row came what a week ago would have been hailed as a special joy—a letter from her betrothed husband, Captain Wenlock, to announce the return of his regiment from Malta. He had been away for more than a year, and Mr. Wolferston had promised that directly he returned the marriage should take place. Now, such a thought was mockery. She crushed the letter into her pocket, feeling as if the very gladness its contents had filled her with were a robbery from the sorrow due to the dear father just taken to his rest.

The same post, too, brought her mother a letter from Richard Wolferston—a formal letter of condolence, and an offer of service if he could in any way be of use to his dear cousin's wife and children.

Janet opened it, and grew thoughtful as she read. "I do not like to worry, dear mother," she said, "and yet I must. My father's will must be read. I wonder if Mr. Painson has it, or whether it was transferred to Richard?"

She wrote to Mr. Painson and asked the question before she spoke to her mother.

The answer came promptly. Mr. Painson regretted that he had no longer any claim to advise Mrs. Wolferston legally, although as a friend he would always be entirely at her disposal. It was a very kind, warm letter, contrasted with Richard's, and something in the difference between the two struck Janet painfully. She gave both letters to her mother.

Mrs. Wolferston read them attentively, but she made no comment, except to tell Janet that she wished both Mr. Painson and their cousin to be present at the funeral.

The day came, and with it that fearfully sharp wrench, almost like the severance of body and spirit, when the loved one is really taken from our mortal eyes for ever. Janet and little Christopher followed their father to the grave, and returned home soothed and comforted.

Janet came to her mother's room: "I am not going to stay with you, dear-

est." She kissed her fondly as she spoke. "Mr. Painson wishes me to be present when the will is read. Will Mary come too, or will she stay with you?"

To her surprise, Mary rose up briskly and said she would accompany her, but as she reached the door she looked back at her mother. There was a plaintive, beseeching tenderness in Mrs. Wolferston's face, doubly plaintive in the mournful cap she wore for the first time, that recalled her wayward daughter's straying thoughts. Mary left Janet abruptly and sat down again beside her mother.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Wolferston had any very near relations. Mrs. Dawson, a sister of the late squire's father, and Mr. and Mrs. Webb, the last a cousin of Mrs. Wolferston, the doctor, the clergyman, Mr. Painson and Richard Wolferston, and another person, a stranger,—these were all the group that Janet found collected in the dining-room. They seemed to have been waiting for her.

Kind Aunt Dawson came forward and made Janet sit between herself and Mrs. Webb: then there was some little earnest talk between Mr. Painson and Richard Wolferston, who stood half hidden in the deep bay window; and then the stranger, whom Richard named to Mr. Painson as one of his clerks, seated himself before a desk and began to read.

Janet tried to listen and to understand, but she could not. After the first few words all sounded like a confused jargon, belonging to some far-off period of language rather than the present. Exactly opposite to her as she sat was a portrait of her father, painted at the time of his marriage, and as she gazed on the fair, handsome face, with its winsome smile and open, fearless eyes, the memory of her loss grew painfully present, and all outward sights and sounds were obliterated.

Her own love for Captain Wenlock—for, though her reserve made her chary of speaking of him, she loved him with all the strength of her nature—gave

Janet some estimate of the agony her mother suffered, and the contemplation of the long widowed years that might yet be in store for this darling mother was almost more than she could bear. It was terrible to sit there racked with such sorrow, with the outward consciousness that it must be restrained and kept within bounds.

It seemed as if the clerk's monotonous voice had been reading on for hours when it suddenly stopped. There was a confused murmur of voices, some speaking with vehement disapproval. Mrs. Webb's was the loudest: "It's shameful, and there's no other word for it—after being such a wife, too, as no man ever had before! I do say it comes very near a fraud. Not but what I always thought poor dear Christopher inclined to be selfish."

Selfish! her father selfish!

Janet looked up quickly, but she saw Aunt Dawson quieting Mrs. Webb, and she sat still and tried to understand the cause of this commotion.

Mr. Painson stepped forward and begged for silence. He looked severely at Mrs. Webb, who was scandalized at such a breach of decorum.

The clerk went drawling on, and Janet tried to listen. She could not quite understand, but it seemed to her that Richard Wolferston's name came in continually. A few words at the close specially impressed her: "Therefore, as the estate, if entailed, must have belonged to the said Richard Wolferston years ago, and has only been alienated from him by a prejudice arising from no fault of his, I am hereby by this restitution merely doing the part of an honest man to him and his heirs, and relieving mine from the burden of unjust possession."

Then the paper concluded formally, and the clerk handed it to Mr. Painson.

There was a dead silence. Janet was conscious that something utterly unexpected had happened, that some new misfortune had fallen on her mother, but before she could in any way collect her thoughts Mr. Painson came up to her with the will in his hand: "You and

I, Miss Janet, will go to mamma now: the sooner this news is broken to her the better."

She took his arm passively, but directly she found herself alone with him, in the gallery outside her mother's room, she stopped: "I can't quite make it out." She passed her hand across her forehead, as if to clear away the confusion from her brain. "Why did Mrs. Webb call dear papa selfish, and why did every one look so angrily at Richard Wolferston?"

Mr. Painson pulled up his shirt collar stiffly. He had flattered himself that Janet had shown an early promise of developing excellent business powers: it was mortifying that an affair simple enough for the comprehension of a baby had puzzled her.

"Why, my dear child, it lies in a nutshell. Your father, in what—don't look shocked, Miss Janet—even I must call an unwarrantable fit of conscientiousness, has willed Rookstone and all its appurtenances to Richard Wolferston as heir-at-law, and left your mother four hundred pounds a year for her life, with succession to Christopher, and to you each one hundred a year. I must say, my dear, that it's fairly monstrous: it will take me some time to get over. Now shall we go in to your poor dear mamma?"

CHAPTER VII.

MR. PAINSON'S STORY.

"I WAS prepared for something unexpected in my late dear friend's disposal of his property," Mr. Painson said when he had communicated the contents of her husband's will to Mrs. Wolferston. "Before I got Miss Janet's note, Mr. Richard Wolferston had written to ask me to be present to-day, as he said his cousin had made a different will from his former one." The old lawyer checked himself. Mary's eyes were fixed on him with a strange intensity, and he began to consider whether the presence of so many listeners was desirable. He was a bachelor, a cautious as well as a nervous man, and he had a very hazy

belief in the trustworthiness of any woman, always excepting his favorite Janet, whom he had petted from her childhood. But as he could not well make a difference between the sisters, he said he thought what he had to say had better be told to their mother only.

Janet rose at once and looked at her sister, but Mary lingered: she felt that what Mr. Painson had to tell was in some way connected with Richard Wolferston, and she longed to stay and defend him from any blame which might be laid to his charge.

"You can go to Aunt Dawson and Cousin Louisa, dears," Mrs. Wolferston said. "After what Mr. Painson has just told me, I think I will not attempt to see them to-day: will you give them my love and ask them to excuse me?" As soon as the girls left the room she turned to Mr. Painson: "This news surprises me, of course, but still not so much as I dare say you expect. Only a short time ago he—my darling husband—spoke of restitution due to his cousin. We were interrupted, and he did not fully explain himself. I remember he said he had promised to keep the matter a secret, but I am sure he meant to have told me his intentions—if—if this had not happened." She tried to be calm, but it was very difficult to speak of her lost one without emotion. She went on presently: "You can do me a great service, Mr. Painson, if you will. You can caution Mrs. Webb especially that no one must venture to disapprove of this disposal of Rookstone—to me, I mean. Mrs. Webb means well, but there are times when well-meaning people can do a great deal of harm." She spoke with dignity. She wished the old lawyer to understand that this prohibition extended to him also.

He bowed: he was lost in wonder, partly reverent and partly pitying, for he thought in her extreme duty to her husband this perfect wife was forgetting the claims of her children.

"May I ask you a few questions?" he said. "I want specially to know when the conversation you mention took

place: can you remember the exact day?"

She thought a minute: "Yes: it was the 25th of May. I remember the day well, because Richard Wolferston came down on business."

"Ah!" The old lawyer's brows knit. He had never conquered his vexation at the breach that had occurred between the late squire of Rookstone and himself. "May I ask if my dear late friend had seen his cousin when he told you this?"

"No: he was sitting in the saloon with me, expecting him. It was his arrival, in fact, that broke off the conversation I spoke of."

"And when Mr. Richard left did you renew it?"

"No: he stayed till next morning, and—" She paused, and a faint color stole over her pale face. She could not say she had forgotten it, for she knew that during those few happy days that followed she had studiously avoided any topic which would lead to the mention of her husband's cousin, in her tender shrinking from a revival of the former discussion.

Mr. Painson's raised eye saw that she was keeping something from him, but it was not his way with women to face a perplexity openly: he considered them subtle creatures, and therefore took them, if he could, at unawares: "You must forgive me, my dear lady, if I seem to give you needless pain, but from your applying to me, as you did, immediately after this distressing calamity, I imagine that you have some wish to rely on my advice?" She only bowed, and he went on, not looking at her. His green-gray eyes had a trick of wandering about nervously, as if they could find nothing satisfactory to rest on. "Now I want you to try and concentrate your memory on the occurrences of the last few weeks, and, having done so, to tell me whether you have not seen a difference in your husband's manner—a flightiness, perhaps, or a despondency, or a restlessness, or an irritability, which might have shown you, if you had been less blinded by—by natural affection, that— Stay, my dear lady, you prom-

ised to hear me out," for Mrs. Wolferston tried eagerly to interrupt him—"I say, which might have shown you that his intellect was clouded—not quite sound, in fact."

He touched his forehead to point his meaning, but Mrs. Wolferston had risen and stood looking at him with pained surprise: "I see what you mean, Mr. Painson, and I must tell you that you are very wrong even to hint such a suspicion. Do you think me so regardless of my boy's future as to suppose that I could take his disinheritance quietly if I thought his father had not really willed it?—for if his mind had been affected, I consider the act would not have been, his own."

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Painson, meekly—her outbreak had been more vehement than he expected, and he had as great a dread of a woman's wrath as some folks have of cold water—"but you led me into this supposition yourself."

"I?" She looked confounded.

"Yes. Just now, when you spoke of Richard Wolferston, your manner was so confused and so unbecomingly that you irresistibly led me to the conclusion that he had unduly influenced the late squire in the disposal of his property, and that you had combated such a disposition; and knowing the nature of my dear late friend's feelings for you as I did, I could not fancy this influence being used successfully against yours had Mr. Wolferston's mind not been previously warped."

For a moment his manœuvre had nearly succeeded. In her anxiety to establish the soundness of her husband's intellect she was on the point of betraying the secret of their discussion and of her own dispute with his cousin; but Amy Wolferston had been trained early to set a watch on her words. Perhaps the very dispute I have mentioned was one of the few occasions when this habit had been neglected, and the bitter remembrance it had left, that on her last day of married life she had acted in opposition to what she knew were her husband's wishes, served to keep her watch-

ful over her words now. The bitterness was doubled, because, as we know, she had been obliged to keep the matter from her husband.

"My uneasiness arose from quite another cause," she said, quietly—"a cause which could not in any way affect your present inquiry."

She spoke, as she thought, the truth, and yet if she had then told Mr. Painson all that had really happened, he might have read his old friend's strange will through a different pair of spectacles.

"There is something I should like explained more clearly," she said. "You understand that I entirely accept this disposition of his property as Mr. Wolferston's deliberate wish, but I want quite to understand the nature of his cousin's claim."

Again Mr. Painson inveighed mentally against the dullness of womankind, for was not the whole claim of kindred fairly stated in the will he had just read to her?

"Richard Wolferston"—he pulled up his shirt collar and spoke in his most impressive manner, knocking off the different items of his statement with his raised forefinger—"is the son of his father, Charles Wolferston; and Charles Wolferston was the son of Christopher Wolferston, the late squire's grandfather and predecessor at Rookstone. You know—or it is quite possible you don't know, for such extraordinary pains were taken to keep the matter quiet that I don't believe there are above a couple of people left, besides myself, who remember the story—that the old squire had only these two children—Janet, the eldest, your husband's mother, and this boy Charles. Charles was intended for the army: he went to Eton first—there he was soon rusticated; and at Oxford he got worse and worse. He was about the wildest young fellow you can imagine. I fancy the old squire was too indulgent at first, and then desperately hard when he found he had been deceived. The mother had died young, you see, and Janet had married and was living abroad with her husband; so there was no one always at hand to say

a good word for the poor young scoundrel; for he was a scoundrel to deceive his father as he did. I did what I could. I was the junior in the firm that then managed the Rookstone property, but Charles contrived to blind me too. His father paid all his debts, as he supposed, purchased him a commission and made him a handsome allowance; and the first news he got of his son was that he was arrested for about three times the amount he had just relieved him from. Even then he did not quite give him up. He insisted on his leaving the army and taking to a more hard-working life, for he dreaded the extravagance which he might be led into. He went into a well-known banker's: it was difficult enough to get him in, but his antecedents had been kept so quiet that it was generally believed he had sold out because his regiment was ordered abroad and he couldn't get any exchange." Mr. Painson stopped abruptly and looked searchingly at the pale, earnest face. He had got warmed with his subject, and it seemed to him that, circumstanced as his friend's widow was with Richard Wolferston, she ought to know his whole history. "Now comes a fact"—he spoke in a low, cautious tone—"which I can only mention in the strictest possible confidence. My dear late friend must have been aware of it, and it was this, no doubt, which he intended to communicate to you as soon as his cousin released him from his promise of secrecy. It is said in the will that Christopher Wolferston, your husband's grandfather, disinherited his only son Charles in favor of his daughter Janet, then the wife of Sir Gordon Dawson; that the same Janet had become a widow before this news of her brother's disinheritance reached her; that when she returned here to Rookstone after her husband's demise, bringing her boy Christopher with her, the old squire took legal measures to change his name to Wolferston—But of course you knew about this change of name before?"

"Ah, yes: I have heard it from old Aunt Dawson. She calls herself Mrs.,

but, as you know, she is the maiden sister of my husband's father."

"Yes, yes, she could tell you that, and she no doubt thought the young scapegrace Charles Wolferston rightly served for his extravagance and his unfortunate marriage, for he went over to Paris and got married to an opera-singer there; but he was not disinherited on those counts. Before then something had happened which broke the old man's heart: he lived some years afterward, but he never held up his head again. This is what did it: One day one of the partners of the firm in which Charles had been placed came down to Rookstone— You will not breathe this even to your daughter Janet?"

"No," she answered. She shrank from the story of another person's guilt, but the thought of Mary made her determine to know all that was to be known of Richard Wolferston.

"Charles Wolferston had forged a cheque for one thousand pounds on the bank in the name of one of the partners. Happily for him, the fraud had been discovered at once and therefore was easily concealed. The firm behaved nobly: the only compensation they demanded was that the culprit should leave England and pledge himself not to return for a term of years—I forget the precise time: however, he died in California before the expiration of it, when his son, this very Richard, was about nine years old. I believe he still receives the allowance the old squire made to his cast-off son; but this was all managed so secretly that your husband knew nothing of his cousin's existence even until he received a letter from Richard himself, announcing his return to England, rather more than a year ago."

"Then no one knows anything about Richard Wolferston's previous life?"

"I have never met with any one who knows anything about him; but, my dear friend, if you will permit me to call you so, I have not many acquaintances, and none of them have ever lived in Australia or California."



PART II.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARY'S CONFESSION.

THE son of a felon!—for, although not convicted in a court of justice, what else had Charles Wolferston been?—and this was the man who loved Mary, and for whom she feared Mary had more than a mere cousinly liking!

Long after Mr. Painson left her, Mrs. Wolferston sat thinking in her dressing-room, tortured by the feeling that either she must risk her daughter's safety or her happiness. On one point she would not let her thoughts rest—her husband's incaution in admitting his cousin to intimacy with his children on such short acquaintance. The excuse for this was Richard's irresistible charm of manner—a charm which she acknowledged in spite of her disapproval of his principles—a charm which seemed to have subjugated all the inhabitants of Rookstone except Janet and old Kitty Robbins.

For the present the shock of Mr. Painson's story had dulled the remembrance that Rookstone was no longer a home for her and her children, but after a while this came back. It was so very hard to go away—to leave this first and only home of her wedded happiness—to go where she should have nothing to remind her of her husband; but a mind so raised above earthly things as Amy Wolferston's was soon restored from this trial of its peace. "What am I lamenting over?" she said—"I, the half of whose life has already passed away! How much worse it is for these young ones, just at the time when they were entering on all the pleasures and amusements their position entitled them to en-

joy! How shall I comfort them and win them to be resigned if I am myself rebellious?"

She spoke to both her daughters next morning. She found Janet silent, unwilling to enter on the subject of the will: she got up and left the room when her mother turned to Mary.

Mary's eyes were round with surprise: "But, mamma, why need we go? Richard does not wish it. How could he? He would not grieve you for the world: I am sure he would not."

"How can you be sure, Mary?"

The beautiful girl blushed at the grave question, but she crept up to her mother a minute afterward and put both arms round her:

"He told me so himself yesterday, when Janet took me away from you and that hateful old man."

"Hush, my darling."

"Well, I must hate him, for I know he tries to set you against Richard, just because he is so clever and knows better how to manage dear papa's business. When we got down stairs Richard was in the hall. I don't know what became of Janet. Just then I was very angry, because I thought, as you do, that he—Richard, I mean—was an usurper, and was driving you away from your rightful home."

"What else could you think?"

"Well, we are both wrong, darling mamma." She kissed her mother again, as if she would conquer the incredulity she read in her eyes. "Richard was so surprised and shocked when I said it that it was impossible to think he had ever contemplated driving us away. He told me that he and Mr. Painson had

been appointed joint guardians of Christy, and he said this is a plain proof that dear papa never meant us to leave Rookstone."

Mrs. Wolferston drew her daughter's hands into her own, and, holding them there, looked at her steadily: "My dear Mary, you are not quite a child: try and consider this question as if you had no interest in it. Would your father have made his cousin master of Rookstone during my lifetime if he had intended me to remain here?"

"Ah, but that is just the point Richard made so clear. He said dearest papa had suffered from a scruple of conscience ever since he had known that his uncle Charles had left a son, and it was only to quiet this scruple that Richard yielded to the will being in its present form; for, as he says, he was only ten years younger than papa when the will was made, and he thought his life the worst of the two. Even if the property had been left to you, some one must have managed it for you. Why cannot you stay here, dearest, and consider him as only the manager? You will make him and all of us happy by doing this." Mary spoke eagerly, with flushed cheeks and imploring eyes.

"My darling, listen. I know what Richard does not. Before your father made this will he was thoroughly aware that I wished to break off our intimacy with Richard. Stop, Mary, and hear my reasons." The impetuous girl pulled both hands away from her mother and hid her face between them. "It is not possible, therefore, that he could have intended us to live together: it would be an insult toward him to judge him so wanting in tenderness toward me. You are fond of Richard. It is quite natural: he is your cousin, and has been very kind both to you and Christy; but, Mary, Richard is not a good companion for either of you." The flushed face looked up, half angry, half tearful, the rosy, pouting lip drooping doubtfully. "I do not blame him, for he has had no home-teaching which could help him, and much foreign residence rarely improves a man. I do not

think, my darling, you could be long content with a friend who mocks at all religious ordinances as Richard does."

"Ah but, mamma, are we not told not to judge others, and may not he be thoroughly good, although he gives no outward sign of it?"

Mrs. Wolferston trembled. It seemed to her that the evil influence had gone deep with Mary already. "I am no bigot, Mary," she said. "I hold that love and truth in the heart must be pleasing to God, but I also think that he has always shown in all ages that he wills mankind to give him some outward form of worship, and I cannot believe that anything but self-will in its deadliest form refuses this act of public homage and thanksgiving."

The flush faded from the girl's face—faded to an almost deathlike whiteness: her hand fell idly in her lap: "Mamma"—the words were rather sobbed than spoken—"if I may not trust Richard take me away from Rookstone. I could never stay with him and not—" She buried her face on her mother's shoulder.

Mrs. Wolferston saw how deep the wound was, and shrank from probing it, but she saw, too, that she must not remain one day longer than was needful at Rookstone.

CHAPTER IX.

A CHANGE OF PLANS.

BUT matters will not always arrange themselves as we wish.

On the morning after the reading of the will the widow received a letter from the new master of Rookstone. In it he repeated all that Mary had already told her. He begged her not to remember, but to pardon, the hasty and uncourteous words he had spoken on the evening of his last visit. He would not attempt to deny his love for Mary, but if Mrs. Wolferston thought his presence at Rookstone undesirable, he would remain in London, and only visit her when she required his advice or when his presence might be wanted on the estate. If she would treat him as a

brother, as one whom her husband had loved and believed in, he would be satisfied to wait, and hope that her mind might change about Mary.

Mrs. Wolferston showed this letter to Janet. She had been so accustomed to carry every thought and every wish to her husband that she could not resist the comfort Janet's firm mind and single-hearted view of things gave her. Janet read the letter very slowly. The cloud of gloom that had settled on her face since the reading of the will had not left it. "I am almost sorry you consulted me," she said: "I feel I take a selfish view of the whole matter, and so cannot judge fairly."

"I think we must judge alike on one point, dearest—that Richard Wolferston is disposed to act generously and delicately toward us."

"That is just the point on which I suppose my mind is warped," Janet said, bitterly. She stood still a moment, thinking. "Mother, if one has a suspicion, a dreadful, terrible doubt about another person, and one knows at the same time that one's own motives are interested in cherishing this suspicion, how should one act?" She had taken one of her mother's hands as she spoke, and was grasping it with painful tightness.

"You are excited, my darling: you have been overwrought these last few days, and your mind mistakes fancies for convictions. Try to turn your thoughts to something else."

She bent forward and kissed Janet's forehead, lined slightly already with traces of thought, but the girl still looked restless and unquiet: "You don't quite understand me, mother: would it be wrong to tell you what my suspicion is?"

"Try to conquer it instead: if you cannot do that, then I suppose I must hear it; but I could only do this for your sake, Janet; and I believe if you take the means I suggest you will not find it necessary to consult me."

Janet turned away. The world had indeed changed if her own darling mother refused to listen to her confi-

dence. What had come to her? She seemed quite to have forgotten how this change of fortune had ruined her eldest child's hopes of happiness. When Janet had been promised to Henry Wenlock she was the daughter of the rich Mr. Wolferston of Rookstone: her lover could not be expected to keep faith with her in such a different position. If her mother would only have listened to her, she would have asked her advice, but this check threw her back into silence. "For the future I will lean only on myself," she thought.

Mrs. Wolferston watched her anxiously. She did not guess that distress and anxiety had brought disease to aid them, and that Janet's mind was no longer under her own control.

In the evening Mr. Painson came down from London to take Mrs. Wolferston's instructions. He was surprised to find her in such haste to leave Rookstone, but her resolution was not to be altered.

He returned to town early next morning, promising that by the end of a week he would have a small house ready for their reception in one of the London suburbs. Mrs. Wolferston thought, on Christopher's account, it would be desirable to give up a country life.

It had been arranged that the day before they left Rookstone, Richard Wolferston should come down and be formally put in possession by Mr. Painson. The latter had objected to this, as exposing the widow to unnecessary pain; but Mrs. Wolferston expressed a wish to see her husband's cousin once more at Rookstone before she left it.

On the morning of his expected arrival Janet did not appear at breakfast, and when her mother went to her room she found her so ill that all thoughts of a journey were postponed: the country doctor was summoned, and he told Mrs. Wolferston she had better telegraph for further advice. Richard Wolferston and Mr. Painson reached Rookstone in the evening, and they learned that the London physician, who had just preceded them, pronounced that

there was decided pressure on the brain, and that the slightest excitement might augment this to brain fever.

CHAPTER X.

THE WAVERLEY AVENUE.

FOR several days Janet lay between life and death. Her mother never left her. Mary wished to stay with her mother and share her anxious watchings, but Mrs. Wolferston would not even allow her to enter the sick room. "It can do no good," she said, "and the sudden sight of a fresh face may cause the excitement the doctor dreads."

In her utter absorption for Janet, Mrs. Wolferston did not ask whether Richard still remained at Rookstone. She had warned Mary against him. She knew that Mr. Painson, in his anxiety for Janet, would be frequently at Rookstone: she could only trust that all would be ordered for the best.

Mary came down stairs disconsolately when her mother forbade her to enter Janet's bed-room. She knew her cousin did not intend to leave Rookstone: she had heard him arranging plans with Mr. Painson which must occupy several days.

"I wish mamma would have had me with her," she said. "I want to obey her advice strictly, and yet I seem to be put into the way of temptation."

She strolled out on the terrace. Christopher was teasing the peacocks, making them fly so as to shake out their feathers. He said, "I want to make a fan for mamma. Richard won't mind my having these, though I suppose they are all his now." His joyous face looked serious, and the little fellow sighed.

"You poor, dear little thing!" Mary stooped and kissed him. "If it were only the feathers, we would not mind who took them from us."

"Now, that's where girls know nothing. I just should mind anybody taking my particular own feathers which I've always had to play with. Look, here comes Richard. I say, let us go and ask if—I mayn't have them."

"No, Chris, come this way: I'll show

you such a lovely squirrel in that old oak in the copse-bit. Won't you come? Very well, then, I shall go alone."

She saw Richard hastening toward them. If he joined her she should forget all her good resolutions. She turned away and left the terrace.

Richard Wolferston bit his lips: he could not mistake Mary's action. She had waited till he came almost within speaking distance, and then had pointedly avoided him. Christopher ran up: "I say, Cousin Richard, do you mind my taking the feathers?"

"Where is Mary gone?" his cousin asked.

"She said she was going to look at a squirrel, but she never thought about going till I told her you were coming. Why"—he looked earnestly in his cousin's face—"you are quite red, Richard: don't be angry with Mary. I'll go and tell her you want her, if you like."

"Don't be a little fool!" Richard spoke savagely, and caught his young cousin by the shoulder. "Who said I wanted her?"

The boy made no attempt to struggle. He was so utterly surprised that for a moment his busy little tongue was silenced. He had been Richard's pet and playmate, and he thought his cousin must be joking. A glance at his frowning forehead and compressed lips taught him his mistake, and, rousing himself, he tried to shake off the rough grasp on his arm. "You never dared speak so to me when papa was alive," said the fearless child, his blue eyes looking as stern as Janet's. "You need not be afraid I shall fetch Mary. No, I am not going to tell tales of you;" for he saw a change in his cousin's face, and with childlike quickness of perception interpreted it rightly. "I shall leave her to find out for herself how cross you can be. Janet was right, after all."

Something in the words affected Richard. He let the child go, and walked into the house. "Janet was right, after all!"

He had gone into the study, and he sat deliberately down in his dead cousin's high-backed chair to think out the

child's meaning. "But I am a fool to worry myself about the nonsense of a baby like Chris." He got up and moved toward the door again. "I did not need to be told that Janet dislikes me because I would not submit to her proud and interfering spirit. Neither she nor her mother has ever shown me due courtesy. Why should I hesitate to plead my own cause with Mary? The only advocate I had with her is gone now. Poor Christopher! I suppose few people would believe how heartily I wish him back again. That sanctified wife of his will be civil to me to serve her own purposes, but she will leave no stone unturned to keep Mary from me: for what else was she hurrying away with her from Rookstone? She must have poisoned the dear little thing's mind to some purpose, too, for her to avoid me as she did just now." He stopped with his hand on the lock of the door. Had he been deceiving himself all this time, and was Mary really indifferent to him? "I was never deceived in a woman yet," he thought, "and a nature like hers cannot be mistaken. She's a sweet, loving, yielding child at present, but no doubt her puritanical mother has infused a strong ingredient of duty, which is another name for prejudice. I defy Mrs. Wolferston herself to rob me of Mary if I am determined to win her"—he smiled proudly—"but I don't see why the poor little darling should go through any mental torture on the subject. I said I would not attempt to win her affections, but that was on condition that Mrs. Wolferston accepted my terms; and moreover, Mary's manner tells me that her mother has not remained passive in the matter: the child has plainly been told to avoid me. Look to yourself, Mrs. Wolferston! you have taken the first step. By all means—I follow your example."

There was a bright, eager light in his eyes as he crossed the saloon. Chris was lying on one of the divans playing with Loulou. The sight of the dog made Richard doubt for a moment whether Mary was not nearer than he imagined, but he did not choose to ask any more

questions. It was in one way a comfort to have offended Chris: there was no danger that the child would follow him. The left-hand boundary of the lawn which stretched out at the foot of the terrace was a long range of conservatory. Beyond this the ground sloped gently to the entrance of a long alley, or rather avenue, of lofty elm trees: the avenue itself was narrow, so that the meeting branches overhead took the form of an acutely-pointed gothic arch, filled just now with the tender green atmosphere of "leafy June." Here and there were seats almost hidden behind the massive tree-trunks, and rather more in front, full of exquisite light and shade as stray sunbeams glinted down on them from between the leaves, were quaintly-sculptured graystone statues, representing characters from the Waverley novels.

Richard looked down this cool, inviting vista, but there was no trace of Mary. At its farther end, however, he saw the small iron gate open. He knew that this led to the flower-garden. He believed that Mary had retraced her steps from the copse-bit, and would be found here. Love's instincts are usually to be trusted, and with all Richard's errors his love for Mary Wolferston was true, and, so far as his lights guided him, unselfish. "I wonder where my grandfather picked up these quaint old bits of stone-work?" he said, looking at Ivanhoe, spear in hand, with the blank shield of the Disinherited Knight: "one would fancy they must have been new when he put them here, and yet they bear all the traces of antiquity. Exposure to the weather and the constant drip from the trees, I suppose, eats away the surface." He hurried on past Rob Roy in his bonnet and kilt, past the Lowland-garbed, bent figure of Old Mortality, almost past a stout, stalwart man-at-arms—no other than that dear friend of boyhood, Dugald Dalgetty—but he stopped here suddenly.

Out of sight, screened on one side by the square block on which the figure stood, and by a huge elm trunk on the other, safely sheltered in the deep, cool shadow, Mary lay on the grass, seem-

ingly asleep. She looked very lovely lying there, her fair hair half escaping from the black ribbon that tied it, and harmonizing perfectly with the green shadow, spangled with golden flecks and sparkling down between the leaves to rest on the virginal head at the foot of the stone pedestal. Her hat lay beside her, half filled with wild roses: it was plain she had been to the copse-bit.

But Mary was not sleeping. Richard had walked on the turf, which reached on either side as far as the wire fence dividing the avenue from the park, and she had not heard his footsteps. While he still stood gazing at the picture she made lying there beside the grim old soldier, she started up and suddenly faced him. A look of terror and then of uneasiness clouded her lovely face.

He did not attempt to take her hand: he spoke in his gentlest voice: he saw that she must be soothed if he would have her listen to him. "I have been looking for you," he said.

Mary blushed and hesitated, then she raised her eyes fearlessly: "I must go to dear mamma. Do you know Janet is in a very critical state?"

She spoke with a coldness that might have checked his ardor, but Richard Wolferston was too practiced a man of the world not to read this innocent young girl rightly; or rather he read her, because they loved each other, for fearless innocence will sometimes prove a hard enigma to mere worldliness without the help of that sure sympathy which unlocks all hearts.

"Yes, the doctor told me so, and I have been looking for you ever since." He stopped to see if her attention was gained, but she glanced furtively along the avenue, as if she still meditated flight. "After what Mr. Bannocks told me, I felt anxious to see your mother"—this was true: he was returning to the house with this intention when the sight of Mary on the terrace put everything else out of his head—"but perhaps it may be as well to send her a message through you."

Mary's face was fully turned toward

him now: her self-distrust was lulled to sleep—there could be no harm in speaking to him about anything that might be important to dear suffering Janet.

But Richard did not mean his interview to end under the elm trees.

CHAPTER XI.

A TESTING SCENE.

"MR. GORING said"—as he spoke he walked slowly on toward the little iron gate at the farther end of the avenue, and Mary found herself obliged to follow—"that he thinks your sister's illness will be a tedious one, but that he does not consider her symptoms dangerous: his anxiety seems to be quite as active on your mother's account." He saw the little start of fear, and he felt that she drew nearer in her eagerness to listen. "After all that has lately happened, Mrs. Wolferston will be unable to bear the fatigue of such continued nursing. Mr. Goring says that your maid Thomson is also a very delicate person. Now, my dear child, will it not be better to send to London for a professional nurse at once? Only tell me what you wish, and I will go to town myself and choose a desirable person." The tears were coming so fast that she hung down her head to hide them. This was the man her mother and Janet had thought selfish! She had heard that sudden prosperity tested men more truly than sudden adversity. This was only the second time she had talked with him alone since the reading of the will, and how full of nobleness and generosity she had found him!

He was growing impatient for her to speak, but he was too wise to hurry her. The avenue was walled in from the flower-garden by a tall yew hedge on either side of the gate, and over this was an arch of rose trees: on the right, lying back beyond the gate, was a small bower covered also with clustering roses.

Richard had remembered this pleasant resting-place when he found Mary beside the old statue, and with the

prompt decision and iron will which, when united, enable men to rule others at their pleasure, he had resolved that the story of his love should be spoken here.

When they reached the gate he opened it and held it for her to pass through. "Well?" he said at last, for she stood still and silent.

"I don't know how to thank you, you are so very kind; but I am afraid dear mamma would not like any stranger to go near Janet: perhaps if I ask her again, she might let me help her."

"She will not do that," he answered. He meant that he should not consent to such a risk for Mary. "But is there no poor woman among the cottagers used to illness? I thought every village had its wise woman."

Mary stood thinking. "There is Kitty Robbins," she said at last. "She is a cross old woman, and never cares what she says, but she is a very good nurse; only I am afraid she is still lame."

"Sit down and rest while you think some of the people over. That Kitty looks a perfect old hag; I can't fancy your mother would like her."

He went into the bower, and she followed him and seated herself on the low bench which ran round it. Richard remained standing, his gaze fixed on her drooping eyes.

"I can't think of any one else," she said; "but had I not better go at once to mamma and ask her if she wants anybody?"

"Listen, Mary. You must try to rely on yourself and spare her the trouble of judging: her life may depend on it." He took her hand, and in her trembling anxiety she was too much overwrought to withdraw it. "The doctor made no *if* about it: he said, 'Mrs. Wolferston's health will give way.' What use is there in consulting your mother?—she is much too good to disobey the doctor. If you cannot think of some villager, I believe I ought to secure a nurse from London as soon as possible."

"If Kitty is not still lame, I know mamma would rather have her than a stranger: I remember when we all had

measles she sent for her to help nurse us."

"Very well, so be it," Richard said, with an impatient sigh: he was glad to get the subject disposed of, and yet he had a special dislike to Kitty Robbins. "We will walk over to the lodge and see her; and now, Mary"—seating himself beside her—"I want to know how I have been so unfortunate as to offend you."

"You have not offended me." In her surprise at his sudden accusation she forgot her resolutions and looked at him with the old sweet frankness.

"You are sure I have not? You don't know how happy you have made me; but I want you to make me still happier—to promise me that you never will be offended with me, but will let me do all I can to show my love for you." She tried to draw away her hand, but he held it firmly. "Mary," he said, softly—the tone stirred her young heart with a wild throb it had never before felt—"I want you to love me, not only as your cousin, but as a friend who will give all his life to serve you. I want you to promise to be my friend too—to cling to me, let who will try and prejudice you against me, for I have no friend but you, Mary."

But the promise did not come as easily as he expected. At first she refused resolutely to resume her former tone of intimacy with him without consulting her mother. He urged upon her the cruelty of distracting her mother's thoughts from Janet, and at the same time the torture she inflicted on him by any doubt of her feelings toward him. Duty struggled for a time, but his tender words and looks were not to be resisted. Before Mary left the bower she had confessed to Richard that she loved him better than any one else in the world, and had promised never to avoid his presence or to believe evil of him.

"There is much about me, Mary"—he drew her fondly toward him—fondly, but gently, for he felt the little fluttering heart's terror—"which I will explain to you some day: now I am content to be misunderstood, because I am too

proud to justify myself; but I am not afraid of you, Mary—I trust you fully: you have all my happiness in your keeping now. You know as little what that is as you do of my love for you. Come, shall we go to Kitty Robbins?"

That walk through the park was like a dream to Mary. Recollections of her mother's warning words came back and troubled her joy, but she soon chased them away.

Richard had said that no one understood him, and under the spell of his dark eyes she could not disbelieve: it was a spell that had magic in it. Mary seemed drawn to him by an irresistible influence, and yet she feared him: she knew she dared not disobey him, even at the risk of her mother's anger.

They were just in sight of the cottage when Richard stopped: "I shall wait for you here, my own: I don't like that old woman."

Kitty Robbins was in the garden watering her flowers when Mary lifted the latch of the little gate: "Good-evening, Kitty. I'm glad to see you about again: then your ankle was not sprained, really?"

"If 'ee means there wur any sham about it, Miss Mary, ye be altogether wrong: my foot wur strained and bruised enough for six, and there be folks as 'ud be sittin' still now, a-crying over it, but Kitty bean't one o' they as frets over spilt milk."

Mary smiled, for Kitty had the reputation of a professed grumbler: "Well, Kitty, I'm glad it is better. Are you well enough to come up and help mamma nurse Janet?" And then came the explanation of the doctor's fears.

While she listened, Kitty stood looking across the park. "Miss Mary," she said abruptly, "what be ye doin' wi' that cousin o' yourn? If madam knowed what I do, it's not a young pretty piece of innocence as 'ee be she'd trust to be slathered over with all the flattering lies he puts he's tongue to—"

"Silence, Kitty!" Mary's eyes flashed with indignation. "Is that the way you speak of your new landlord?"

"Landlord! Bless ye, child! why

your dear, good papa made over this cottage to I for life. What have a landlord to do wi' I? And it's not zackly of heself I wur thinkin': he be a stranger hereabouts, 'ee knaws. Miss Mary, for your life's sake dwoant 'ee love he, dwoant 'ee trust he, dwoant 'ee marry he. There be bad blood in he and his'n. Bide a wee, miss, and listen." The old woman's manner had changed from its usual cynical snarl to one of earnest warning. Mary was impelled to listen against her will. "I had a darter once, a rare pretty gal—not like you, maybe, for she's eyes wur as dark as the new squire's, and she's hair to match, but her wur a beauty. Your grandmother, Lady Dawson, tuk a deal o' notice o' Minnie, and for all of it her wur that modest and sweet, making no account o' sheself. Well, Master Charles, that wur the father o' yon"—she jerked her thumb toward the way by which Mary had come—"him never left my gal in peace till him made she say she loved he. I dwoant say him meant harm to she. Him knowed hur had been bred wi' a good name to uphold; but, Miss Mary, I dwoant think neither (as hur did, poor soul!) as him meant to marry she. Him just found he's time heavy on his hands when t' old squire kep' he fro' Lunnon, and my Minnie lightened it. I wur at Staple-cross nussing, and Jem's father wur too great a gowk to keep the young man fro' coming to the lodge more oft than a should ha' comed if I'd been to home."

"But you said just now no harm happened to Minnie," Mary said, doubtfully.

"I said, miss, no harm came to she's good name—none could ha' come to my Minnie—but if e'er a man killed a young girl in cold blood, that wur Charles Wolferston. Him taught the poor lass to love he better than all the world beside, and him went away from Rookstone wi'out so much as a look or a token."

"Ah, but that might not have been his own fault."

"Come, now, dwoant turn me agen 'ee too—dwoant 'ee now, Miss Mary. I tell ye," she went on, fiercely, "him wur married a few weeks after: him

only cared to look at Minnie's sweet face till he'd something else to pleasure he. He broke her heart: that wur bad eno', for she never held up she's head after she heard the news; and do 'ee think, Miss Mary, it wur fair to set a modest girl up to be talked of, as him did, by running after she for ever. A poor girl, Miss Mary, may be as good as gold, but hur mun keep to her likes if her will na make gossip about she. I telled ye this o' purpose: ye may guess Kitty dwoant go bragging easily o' her darter's sorrow. The new squire comes o' a bad father, and a bad mother too, I believe. Dwoant 'ee love he, neither trust he. He'll bring 'ee to bitter sorrow if 'ee do."

She turned her back abruptly on the frightened girl and disappeared into the cottage.

CHAPTER XII.

CALLED TO ACCOUNT.

MRS. WOLFERSTON was glad to accept Kitty's help, and after a day or two of anxiety a change for the better took place in Janet. Even the doctor, although loth to lose his patient, was obliged to say he thought she might be moved in a week.

Mr. Painson was to quit Rookstone that day, and Mrs. Wolferston sent for him before he started to tell him the good news, and to ask him to prepare the new house for the reception of an invalid.

Janet held out her hand to him as he entered her mother's dressing-room. "You will see me walking about London next week," she said, brightly. "I am quite ready to begin our new life in the pretty little house you wrote to mamma about." Before he went away he had settled with Mrs. Wolferston that, if the amendment in Janet continued, they were to take possession of their new abode that day week.

"If I don't find Miss Mary in the saloon," the old gentleman said as he reached the door, "will you make my best respects to her and my apologies for scant ceremony?"

"I will send for her. Kitty"—Mrs.

Wolferston called the old woman out of her bed-room—"will you tell Miss Mary I want her?"

Kitty gave a sarcastic smile and limped toward the door.

"I won't trouble Mrs. Robbins," said the lawyer. "Perhaps I may find Miss Mary with Mr. Richard. I must see him before I start."

Kitty turned round with a grin: "That 'ee will, sir, if 'ee looks sharp. I saw 'em go down the statty walk together as I wur standing t' end o' long gallery."

Mrs. Wolferston turned so very white that even the busy old man, full of his deeds and plans, saw there was something amiss. He stood looking at her. She forced a smile. "I am not very well," she said. "Will you kindly send Mary to me when you have said good-bye to her?"

He bowed and went away.

Janet's pale face flushed crimson. "Kitty," she said, sharply, "are you sure you saw Miss Mary just now?"

The keen-eyed old woman knew that her words had made what she would have termed "a caddle." She had no actual dislike to Mary, but she took a secret pleasure in revenging herself for the indifference paid to her warning. "It mun ha' bin she," she said, doggedly: "it wur the new squire safe eno', and he and Miss Mary be allus side by side, beant they?"

"Kitty"—Mrs. Wolferston spoke almost as severely as Janet: she disliked asking questions about her own child, and yet she wanted to fathom Kitty's knowledge and to close her mouth toward others—"you cannot know much about Miss Mary since you have been shut up here."

"At your pleasure, Madam Wolferston; but what I said to her I say to you: He beant the man I'd let my girl choose for a husband. He be come of a bad father and a bad mother, and he be likely to come to a bad end heself."

"Hush, hush, Kitty! You must not speak against your new master. Miss Mary is far too young to think of marriage, and you should not couple her

name with her cousin's. Pray don't say anything more about it."

Kitty went down to the housekeeper's room to get her tea, wagging her old head in protest against madam's blindness. Meantime, Mr. Painson was hurrying along the Waverley avenue to overtake the lovers. He did not reach them till they had got to the end of it. They had been too deep in talk to hear his approach till he was close to them.

Mr. Painson was a very incurious old gentleman sometimes, although when need required it he could be as observant as a hawk. He saw Mary's flushed face as she turned round, and he thought she and her cousin had quarreled.

He gave her her mother's message. "I thought I should find you with Mr. Richard," he added; "and if I were you, Miss Mary, I would go to mamma at once, for she seemed ready to faint when I left her."

The truth flashed upon Mary: she looked imploringly at Richard.

"I dare not go," she whispered, "unless you tell me what to say."

Mr. Painson looked from one to the other. He had noticed during this week that they were often together, and although personally he did not care much about Richard Wolferston, he had settled in his own mind that his dear late friend's widow was a wiser woman than he took her for, and meant to make the best she could out of a bad business, by her youngest daughter's marriage with the new owner of Rookstone.

Richard's brows contracted: he took Mary's hand and drew it through his arm: "My cousin has promised to become my wife, Mr. Painson, and she fears that her mother is too much taken up with Janet to sympathize with her."

Mary's blushes deepened. This was not the truth, and yet she feared to contradict Richard.

Mr. Painson smiled gravely. "Young ladies are always diffident," he said: "if I were Miss Mary, I shouldn't keep the matter from my mother."

"She has no intention of doing so: we are simply waiting until Mrs. Wolferston's anxiety for Janet is ended."

Richard spoke very haughtily, and the old lawyer felt all his former doubt and dislike rekindle. "I should say that is quite over," he said coldly: "they are going to London this day week."

He bade them farewell, and went away troubled—he scarcely knew why. Mary was too young for Richard Wolferston, but girls of seventeen often marry men of five-and-thirty; and then Mr. Painson found he was late for his train, and forgot all else.

Mary had paid daily visits to her sister since she began to mend, but the subject of Richard Wolferston had been mutually avoided. Each time she had felt guilty and ill at ease. Richard had told her not to speak of anything that had passed between them until he gave her leave to do so, but she had been unhappy in this concealment.

"You are silly to be so frightened, my darling," he said when Mr. Painson turned away. "Why should your mother object to our engagement? for remember, Mary, it is a solemn engagement, which you cannot set aside without breaking your word."

"I don't want to set it aside," she said, sadly; "but oh, Richard, if you knew what it is to have to confess to mamma that I have deceived her, you would have some pity."

"You have not deceived her," he said, smiling. "I advised you to keep this from her because of her anxiety: it would have been very selfish to tease her with it when Janet was so ill. Don't tell her now unless you like—only that old chatterbox is sure to do it."

"If she does not know it already, I need not tell her then, but you will, won't you, Richard? I do so want her to know, although I dread telling her myself."

"Little coward!" he said fondly: "one would suppose your mother an ogress."

Mary knew the reason of her fears. She had never told Richard of her mother's warning: she feared it might stir up strife between them; but it was this disobedience that rankled so sorely.

When she entered the dressing-room she saw that all was known.

Kitty Robbins' knowing smile would have been enough, but her mother's sad pale face crushed away all the courage left her.

"You can go into my bed-room, Kitty, and shut the door," said Mrs. Wolferston.

It might have been better for Mary if her mother had seen her alone. Janet was the first to speak: "Mary, how could you do it? Is it possible that you have been spending all your time with Richard Wolferston?"

Mary's spirit roused. Before her mother could interpose she answered her sister haughtily.

"Let me speak, Janet," Mrs. Wolferston said, so sadly that Mary's pride melted. "Mary, I only ask you to be perfectly honest and candid. I have left you too much to yourself during this week, and I am therefore partly to blame. Has Richard been your companion often?"

Under Janet's stern reproving eyes Mary would not soften outwardly: "Yes, we have been together every day."

"But did I not warn you, Mary?"

For a moment the sad thrill in her mother's voice had almost conquered, but there is no nature so stubborn as a weak one at bay. Richard's words, "You are the only friend I have—no one understands me," came back to harden her. "You warned me, mamma, because you think Richard very different from what he really is. Please not speak against him to me: I have promised not to listen, and I cannot. You can separate me from him, of course, but nothing can ever change my feelings to him now."

She stood erect, her feet firmly pressed on the floor, resolved that nothing should move or conquer her.

There was a pause, and then her mother looked at Janet, who lay back exhausted on her sofa: "Come with me into your own room, Mary: Janet is not strong enough to bear discussion at present."

Mary followed silently while her mother walked slowly along the gallery, utterly confused by this new mood in her youngest daughter. Mary had been fretful and wayward when thwarted, never stubborn. Her mother prayed earnestly to be guided rightly: it seemed to her impossible that in so short a time matters could have gone far enough to engage Mary's affections irretrievably. If she had known the hours spent in those few days in that heart-to-heart communion which binds people more closely than months of casual visits, she might have given up hope. "Mary, you must answer me one question: Did you tell Richard I wished you to avoid him?"

"No."

"I hoped you would have done this."

"It would have been useless: it would only have made him angry with you."

A flush came into Mrs. Wolferston's face. "I would rather endure his anger than your disobedience," she said.

"Mamma!"—her passion burst from Mary at last: she clasped both hands together and then flung them out wildly toward her mother—"do you think I have not struggled? Do you think I have been happy all this while? I did avoid Richard at first, and that made him own his love for me. I cannot tell you what I feel, mother: it would be impossible. I will never hide anything from you again. I have promised to be Richard's wife, but only with your consent."

She flung her arms round her mother and hid her face on her shoulder, but her caresses were not returned. This cruel blow had come too suddenly to be at once received with resignation. The yielding her daughter up to such a man as her cousin seemed impossible to Mrs. Wolferston. She forgave Mary her deceit more readily than her obstinacy. "At least I may ask this of you," she said, when both had remained silent for a time: "during the rest of our stay at Rookstone only to see Richard with my leave and in my presence."

Mary hesitated. She was willing, in the repentance her mother's sad face was

fast awakening, to make some atonement for the sorrow she had caused, but she feared Richard's anger. "Then let me stay up here with Janet," she said: "if I go down again, I dare not refuse Richard anything he asks me."

Her mother sighed. It had come to this already! Would any length of absence wear out his influence? And then, when she remembered the wonderful fascination of his manner, she grew hopeful, and thought that perhaps at Mary's age the old proverb, "Out of sight out of mind," might be realized.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DRESSING-ROOM WINDOWS.

It was a weary time for Mary.

For the first few days Richard was left without any explanation, to vent his anger and discontent as he liked. Christy had gone on a visit to Mrs. Webb until the moving was over, and, all things considered, he was well out of the way, for his cousin was by no means in an amiable humor.

He was angry with Mary for submitting to this imprisonment, as he termed it; furious with Mrs. Wolferston for daring to oppose him openly—he had not given her credit for so much courage—and he was therefore surprised when, on the evening of the fourth day, he found her waiting for him in the saloon. He bowed to her, and was passing out on to the terrace.

"I want to speak to you," she said, quietly: "can you spare me a few minutes?"

He sat down. At that moment he almost hated Mrs. Wolferston.

"I dare say you have guessed that Mary has spoken to me of you, and I must tell you frankly that after the assurance you gave me I was surprised and grieved to hear what had passed between you and her."

He smiled: he was not afraid of Mrs. Wolferston's influence with Mary, and he was resolved that she should not irritate him.

"I gave you that assurance when I asked you to remain here as mistress,

Mrs. Wolferston; but"—and he smiled with the winning sweetness which always made him hard to resist—"why will you harden yourself against me and against what I believe to be inevitable? You may find a better husband for Mary, but you will not find any one who will make her happier. Surely you wish your child's happiness?" he said earnestly.

Every word he uttered told her his power, and if *she* felt it, what hope could she cherish of freeing Mary from its influence? It was difficult to believe that those dark, soft eyes, looking so earnestly into hers, had been all aflame with hate and anger only an hour ago.

Mrs. Wolferston scarcely knew how to answer him. Had she been too harsh in her judgment? and might not this marriage prove, as her husband had said, the means of reforming Richard? But then, again, she felt sorely troubled—she knew so little of Richard Wolferston.

"I wish Mary's happiness," she said, at last, "but, even at the risk of annoying you, I must speak openly. You and I take different views of happiness: I would choose her happiness in the next world rather than in this."

He sneered—he could not help it—and Mrs. Wolferston saw that he did so.

"Let me finish," she said. "I do not presume to judge you or any one, but my daughter has been accustomed to outward observances which I believe to be essential to her through her whole life: you would probably teach her that these are valueless, and I cannot willingly give her up to such teaching. This is my objection to you; and besides this, I feel that you have been scarcely generous to take advantage of her extreme youth and inexperience."

He got up and walked the length of the room before he answered. He had judged Mrs. Wolferston from a wrong standard. He had not thought she would have spoken so frankly. "After all," he said, at last, "you must not be hard on me. Remember what Mary is, and how dearly I love her. Besides,

the old proverb says, 'All's fair in love.' I do not press for a speedy marriage, and I promise you at once that I will never interfere with her religious notions. If you continue to keep us apart, you will make us both very unhappy for nothing. Mary will not break her promise."

She knew this already, and her perplexity increased to positive torture. The burden of widowhood was indeed heavy now. "I separate you most unwillingly," she said, so sadly that even Richard could not disbelieve. "Mary is only seventeen. In a year you may no longer wish to make her your wife: remember how short a time you have known her. A year of separation will test you both, and will give me a better security, so far as regards her, against the danger I dread."

A year! Why, these four days had nearly killed him. No, he would not and could not endure it. But Mrs. Wolferston found his anger far easier to resist than his entreaties, and finally he submitted, on condition that he was to have one farewell interview in her mother's presence before Mary left Rookstone.

Then he bade Mrs. Wolferston a hasty and rather sullen good-night, and went down the terrace steps into the park.

He had made an immense effort at self-control, and now his anger passed all bounds. He hurried across the park with long, swinging strides. He reached the lake, but he passed round it and climbed the rising ground on the other side. The trees had been thinned out to give a good view of the house from this spot, and Richard flung himself down on the grass. There was still light enough to make out the windows. Mary's room, he knew, was on the other side, but she was probably with Janet, and those three windows exactly opposite to him represented the length of Mrs. Wolferston's rooms.

A year! He would not endure it. Wild ideas of inducing Mary to consent to a private marriage, of carrying her off whether she consented or not, crossed his excited brain; and yet he knew

that Mary would not marry without her mother's blessing. One moment he laughed at such folly, and the next he half owned to himself that he should respect her the more for her firmness.

The darkness grew fast, the surface of the lake dulled from the silver shimmer which had reflected the trees so clearly, lights began to twinkle over the distant house, but Richard Wolferston still lay on the grass above the lake, at war with himself and all the world.

At last he had found a pure, innocent girl who loved him truly—in whose love he might have the happiness of peace and rest; for, like most men who have had to struggle for existence, Richard fancied that he longed for rest, blind to the fact that the excitement engendered by necessity had become a real source of enjoyment.

"I do not pretend to goodness," he said—"what is it but a pretence at which the best player reaps the best reward?—but if I had Mary for a wife, I think I should feel more liking for my fellow-creatures. She seems to send all harsh and discordant thoughts away. She—But why do I say *if*?—she shall be my wife. I have had no *ifs* in my life as yet: no man has who knows how to seize on Opportunity and make her his fortune, instead of making for himself a lifelong regret by his unready hesitation. Her mother urges her youth. Bah!" He shrugged his shoulders with the foreign action inherited from his mother. "As if the cares of life being thrust on her too young—such cares, too, as I shall allow to burden her—could weigh down and crush her bright youth as much as this cruel, barbarous separation! I can fancy her there, tied to that precocious prude Janet, heavy-eyed and heavy-hearted, poor little darling!—perhaps just now crying bitterly over this precious covenant her mother has forced on me."

In his renewed anger at having been conquered by a woman he sprang to his feet, still keeping his eyes fixed on the house, now only a dark, shapeless mass, blent with the surrounding foliage, dotted here and there with spots of light.

As he gazed a quick exclamation escaped him.

At the corner occupied by Mrs. Wolf-erston's three windows there came a sudden brighter light: then one of the windows showed out plainly as if filled with flame. Almost before he had time to grasp the thought the flame had spread to the next window in a broad red glare that told its nature with fearful truth.

Richard Wolferston did not stay to see what came next. His wonderful self-possession helped him now. The keeper's lodge was much nearer to him than the house, and he almost flew there: he roused Jem Robbins, who was already snoring, bade him ride like the wind to Staplecross for the parish engine, and then he turned and ran at full speed to the house.

He found a group of female servants on the lawn, gazing up at the blazing corner of the building. The house was very old, and the flames were spreading rapidly among the dry joists and beams. "Where are Miss Mary and her mother?" he cried.

The women pointed to the saloon. As he reached the window he met the butler: "We can't get the garden-hose to reach so high, sir, and water's scarce."

In an instant Richard's eagerness was gone, and he was calm and collected: "Make all the women help you, Simpson, and form a chain to the lake: there is plenty of water there."

But he had caught sight of Mary's white dress within the saloon, and the next moment he was beside her.

CHAPTER XIV.

FAREWELL TO ROOKSTONE.

MRS. WOLFERSTON stood by her daughter, trying to calm her agitation. Even in that exciting moment Richard Wolferston saw how deathly white she looked, but he only glanced at her, and then lifted Mary in his arms. "Come," he said to her mother, "you are not safe here. Look! the smoke is bursting through the ceiling already."

Mrs. Wolferston sprang after him and

clasped his arm: "Janet! will you save Janet? The staircase is still safe: I have only just left it. I brought Mary down first: she dared not venture alone. The servants are wild with terror: only you can help me."

She turned to re-enter the hall, but Richard held her back firmly. He replaced Mary in her chair. "Look!" he said. He opened the door just a little: the smoke rushed in with blinding force. "No one dare trust the staircase now: follow me at once."

He took up Mary again, and seemingly deaf to Mrs. Wolferston's agonized entreaties, he caught her hand and dragged her after him. As they passed down the steps he saw the men bringing ladders, and heard a cry of inquiry for Kitty. All the servants had thought Miss Janet safe with her mother in the saloon, and no one had felt troubled about Kitty Robbins. He laid Mary on the grass. She had fainted with terror.

"Will you save Janet?" said Mrs. Wolferston.

"Do you see those windows one sheet of flame?" said Richard sternly.

"Yes, yes! that is where she is."

"And you ask me to plunge in there and rescue your daughter at the risk of my life—"

"Oh, don't lose time," she said. "Yes, yes!" in her almost frenzied anxiety.

"If I bring Janet to you safe will you give me Mary for my wife?"

"Go, go! I will give you anything you ask," she said. She pushed him away in frantic terror for her child's safety.

He sprang up the steps at a bound. Two men had nearly reached the windows, but they were driven back by the smoke. Richard caught the last man by the collar and hurled him from the rung on which he still stood trying to get breath for another attempt.

"Now, my men, with a will!" he shouted. "There's less flame at this fourth window: move it there."

The men obeyed with the rapidity that a strong will always exacts in moments of danger, and almost before it was steadied, Richard had sprung up the

ladder and had disappeared in the gulf of black smoke above. Till now all had been eager-tongued excitement. A deep, dead stillness succeeded. The anxious crowd below held its breath in the fearful expectation. Mrs. Wolferston stood a little way apart, her hands clasped, her whole soul poured out in fervent prayer that her darling might yet be spared. How slowly time passed! The flames grew fiercer, and were spreading rapidly along the upper part of the house. The heat was so intense that only the men who held the ladder dared remain on the terrace. Through the black rolling masses tongues of flames leaped out, and then pyramids of sparks fell down, messengers to tell the havoc enacted within.

Mrs. Wolferston's agony grew more than she could bear. She sank on her knees and covered her eyes with her hands. A loud cry from those near her, and she looked up. There was no one on the ladder: its top was hidden by flames that wreathed themselves round it as completely as the smoke had done when Richard disappeared within; but something must have happened to cause this excitement. She started to her feet.

The terrace was in broad light now, and hurrying along it, with one woman in his arms and dragging another by the hand, was Richard Wolferston.

He placed the half-stified girl beside Mary. "You had better look to her," he said simply to Mrs. Wolferston, "and to the poor old woman, too. If she had not guided us to the back staircase, which is stone, you know, we should not be here."

"God bless you! How can I ever thank you?"

But he was on the terrace again, eager, now that anxiety for life was over, to stop the farther progress of the flames.

He could do but little. The water, thrown on in small quantities, seemed rather to refresh the hungry leaping flames, and give them new power to dart on their prey.

The engine came at last, but by that

time the fire had become so extended that it was not easily extinguished. Abbut a third of the house was ruined, and much of the remaining portion seriously damaged.

Even Richard Wolferston agreed that it was better that the widow and her daughters should remove to their new home without delay, and next afternoon they bade a sad farewell to Rookstone—blackened, broken, defiled—no longer the dear home so cherished and so full of sacred memories.

It was a sad leavetaking, and Mrs. Wolferston shortened it as much as possible. Richard helped her into the carriage. "God bless you!" she said, earnestly. It was the first allusion that had been made to Janet's rescue, for he had scarcely seen her since the night before, and the words brought the whole scene back vividly.

He smiled, and pressed her hand in both his own: "I do not hold you to your promise. I asked it when I was beside myself at the thought of separation from Mary, but my own nature is too free to accept an extorted gift. I throw myself entirely on your mercy."

He spoke in so low a voice that only Mrs. Wolferston heard him.

Before she could answer he had signed to the coachman to drive on.

CHAPTER XV.

NO PROOFS.

"MR. PAINSON, ma'am," said the maid; "but he says unless you are quite well enough to see him, he will call again when your mamma is at home."

"Ask him to come in," answered Janet. "I am quite well enough to see an old friend."

She spoke almost eagerly: she seemed afraid he would go away before the maid reached him.

Mr. Painson came in trying to smile, as if there were no change from the luxurious, elegance of the saloon at Rookstone to the small villa drawing-room in which he now found Janet. But when he saw how thin and pale she

looked, her deep mourning making this still more apparent, he fairly broke down in an attempt at a joke.

The room was pretty. Simply furnished, it yet had that nameless taste and elegance in its arrangements which the very presence of some inhabitants creates. It is their atmosphere, and it moves about with them, while in larger, more costly dwellings it is nowhere to be found, or, seen only in some isolated object, makes all the rest still less attractive.

A flower-table, full of graceful ferns, stood near Janet's sofa, and Mr. Painson sighed as he looked at it. He remembered having seen it at Rookstone.

"You must not do that," she said, cheerfully. "I know and understand all your kind feelings for us, dear Mr. Painson, but I believe we ought firmly to resolve against regrets, unless, indeed—" She stopped, and then, meeting his sharp inquiring glance, she blushed and went on hurriedly: "Mamma has taken Mary out for a drive. Mrs. Dawson very kindly sent her carriage, and such an offer is not one to throw away now, is it?"

Again Mr. Painson could not check a sigh, but he uttered no regrets: he inquired after Mrs. Wolferston's health.

Janet thought her mother better than could have been expected after the variety of emotions and trials she had undergone. "But then, you know, my dear mother's life is so bound up in that of others that I believe, in her anxiety first for me and then for Mary, she has given no heed to her own sufferings."

"Is Miss Mary ill, then?" he asked, anxiously.

Janet looked perplexed. "I am sorry I said anything," she said. "I fancied my mother had consulted you. Mr. Painson, will you let me think a minute?"

She rested one cheek on her slender, upturned hand, and sat with bent head. The old lawyer looked at her, wondering how any one could prefer her sister in Janet's presence. Mary was taller, larger in every way: she was certainly handsomer than Janet; but it was the

soul breathing out of Janet's every feature with sparkling truth and intelligence that to him eclipsed all the softer, more material charms of her young sister.

Presently Janet looked up. "You can scarcely fancy how old I feel," she said, sadly. "I seem to have thought more during the last fortnight than through the whole course of my life. Till now I have consulted my mother. It seems to me that I am grown too old to lean on her when she has no prop to sustain her. Do not mistake me: it is in no trust in my own power for self-guidance I say this: it is simply to spare her any little burden of the heavy load she must bear alone. Well," she went on abruptly, "there are things I cannot settle for myself, and in which I feel a man's judgment would help me greatly. If— if Captain Wenlock were in England, I should consult him, but I do not know when I may see him now."

Mr. Painson did not answer her at once: he sat thinking what an exceedingly injudicious adviser a hot-headed young man like Henry Wenlock would be in Janet's present position. Men above fifty are slow to acknowledge the merit of their brethren under thirty years of age.

"You have known me ever since I was a baby, Mr. Painson, and"—she smiled frankly up in his face—"I cannot remember that you ever refused me anything. Will you listen to me now? I have a horrible idea which is wearing me to death—which I believe caused my illness. I dare not burden my mother with it, and yet if I do not get some advice it will either drive me mad or kill me."

She clasped her hands nervously, and such a heartwringing look came into her face that he no longer wondered at her wasted appearance.

"I wish you had told me long ago," he said. "Remember, Miss Janet, for the rest of your life, there is nothing so dangerous for a woman to keep quite to herself as a secret. Now, what is this trouble of yours?"



PART, III.

CHAPTER XV.—*Continued.*

HE spoke gently and bent his head on one side, as if he were encouraging a timid child to confidence.

"Did you ever think—did it ever come into your head to doubt the genuineness of my father's will?"

He started, not slightly, but in positive fear of what her next words might be. To this man of the world, so trained in all its ways and maxims, it was terrible to speak out a plain, unvarnished suspicion. "My dear young lady," he said, "I will hear all you have to communicate before I answer; but remember, we cannot be too cautious in speaking of others."

Janet smiled almost bitterly. "I have been cautious," she said, "or I should not have waited till to-day to utter my doubts. From the first my feeling has been that my father never made that will—that it is a fabrication of Richard Wolferston's?"

He had stretched his hands out to her in deprecation of those last words which he felt were coming, but she would speak them, and then she sat still, relieved by this confession, but in breathless anxiety for his answer.

To her surprise, he smiled when he began to speak: "Well, you know, my dear young lady, such things have happened; and they have happened, we may say, I think, without meaning any offence, especially in cases where the relative who stepped into the property was the family adviser. Privately—you know, Miss Janet, we are talking privately now—relatives as advisers are a mistake." He fidgeted with a ring on his little finger.

"Then you think my suspicion justifiable?" she said eagerly.

He drew his features together and looked at her through his half-shut eyes: "I said nothing of the kind in your case. I was merely stating a fact which, in my legal capacity, caused me to examine the document in question cautiously, and—and—well, Miss Janet, this is perfectly *entre nous*, I suppose—I went so far as to test the signatures, and found them perfectly genuine. No, there is no flaw in that will: the only peg I could find to hang a doubt on was your father's state of mind when he executed it, and that your poor dear mother won't hear a word against."

"Then, in your opinion, I may dismiss this suspicion at once as unjust and groundless?"

"Certainly, I should say so. Dear me!" he said, irritably, "what else can you do? If a thing can't be proved, there's an end of it." Then, without giving her time to speak, he went back to the question which Janet had purposely left unanswered: "Did you say that your sister was ill?"

Janet looked perplexed again: "I thought you knew that she had engaged herself to Richard at Rookstone. Well," for Mr. Painson nodded, "on the night of the fire my mother promised to consent to their marriage, and although Richard afterward released her from this promise, she considers herself bound by it."

"You don't mean to say your mother had anything to say against such a marriage for Miss Mary? Bless my soul!" said the lawyer, in such a state of nervous irritation that he fidgeted from

head to foot, "she must have lost her senses!"

Janet was silent. She was offended with Mr. Painson for blaming her mother, and thoroughly overwhelmed by his assurance of Richard Wolferston's innocence.

"My dear child," he said, "husbands don't grow ready made now-a-days: we must take 'em as we find them; and it will be a thousand pities if anything should occur to prevent your cousin from marrying Miss Mary. If I'd seen mamma I should have told her so. I really hope, Miss Janet, if there is any prejudice at work, you'll do your best to remove it. Dear me! dear me! Miss Mary mayn't have such another chance of settling while she lives."

He shook hands and went away, determined, if he saw Richard Wolferston, not to lose a chance of bringing the lovers together again. His feelings had not changed toward the new squire of Rookstone: he disliked him quite as much as ever. He shrank from his cynical, sarcastic words and his indifferent, supercilious manner, for Richard took no pains to conciliate him; but this marriage with Mary was, in Mr. Painson's eyes, a pure question of worldly advantage to the whole family—the only means, in fact, which would enable the Wolferstons to maintain their former position and connections; and position and connections were among the gods of Mr. Painson's worship. And while he walked quietly back to his office in one of those quaint, deserted streets leading down to what used to be the silent highway of the noblemen and gentlemen of London—streets in which are the remains of houses that tell how society has migrated westward since the days when nobles made the Strand their dwelling-place—Janet sat trying to realize the truth of his assurances. Before Mr. Painson she had controlled both surprise and agitation, but now she could do this no longer.

The will genuine!—the will which she had looked on only as a means of temporarily depriving them of their happy home, of all that was so justly

theirs; for during her illness she had solemnly vowed to devote the remainder of her life, if it were needed, to unravel the mystery of her brother's disinheritance; and now she must yield all this up, must give up the hope of ever again seeing her darling mother the rightful mistress of Rookstone. And Richard? Well, since he had saved her life, her task had seemed harder, but she had not flinched from it.

Almost as soon as they were settled in their new home she had spoken very strongly and warningly to Mary on the subject of her engagement, and had assured her that no blessing could rest on an attachment formed in opposition to her mother's wishes. Mary had reproached her for her own ingratitude to Richard; but the earnest warning, solemnly spoken, had troubled the young girl's peace, and Mary had told her mother that for the present she preferred not to see her cousin, and alleged Janet's warning as her reason.

Mrs. Wolferston was surprised. She could not understand Janet's strange persistence, for at her age it was not likely that the objections which weighed with herself against the marriage could equally influence her eldest daughter. She even felt pained by Janet's ingratitude, and she told her so.

The girl had borne these reproaches silently so long as they were unproven. She had resolved not to utter her suspicions against Richard to any one except Mr. Painson, and now she did not know how to act. It seemed as if the whole tenor of her conduct must change. She must retract her own words, unsay her own arguments, and yet without daring to give any reason for such seeming waywardness; for if Richard Wolferston married Mary, how could she ever tell even her mother the horrible guilt of which she had suspected him?

She tried to thank God for relieving her mind from such a dark, dreadful doubt, but she felt no comfort or relief in this thanksgiving: her words seemed to roll back on herself, confusing and depressing her. She told herself that



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"Mrs. Dawson edged her chair confidentially close to her nephew's widow."

he was cleared from all suspicion, and yet, deep down in her heart, hiding away, doubt lingered—doubt which influenced her, even though as yet she was not aware of its existence.

"Oh, if Henry would only come back," she said, "I should have some one, to help me combat this miserable perplexity; and yet why am I so weak? Probably I shall never see him again. Why do I not at once try to bear my own burden, instead of wishing to lay it on others?"

The servant came in with letters: one of them bore a foreign postmark. It was from Captain Wenlock. Instead of returning to England, his regiment had been ordered up the country for a year, so the letter addressed to him at Malta would probably never reach his hands, and he was still ignorant of all that had happened at Rookstone.

Poor Janet! It was a very hard trial. Three months at least she must still wait before she knew the effect which the change in her fortunes would work in her lover's affections.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. DAWSON'S INVITATION.

BEFORE she slept that night, Janet told her sister that she had given way to unjust prejudice in speaking of Richard Wolferston, and that she hoped Mary would suffer nothing she had said to influence her.

To her surprise, Mary burst into tears. "You are so cruel!" she sobbed: "why not leave me in peace? You first advise me one way and then the other, until I seem not to know what is right or wrong. If Richard really cared for me he would not have released mamma from her promise. Between you all I am made perfectly miserable."

There was no use in combating a mood like this, but next morning Janet repeated nearly the same words to her mother, and told her also how strongly Mr. Painson advised the marriage.

Mrs. Wolferston sighed. "I thought I was acting for the best in opposing it," she said, "but it seems to me that this

marriage is to be, and therefore, of course, I may not set my own will against it. It is a relief to me that you no longer dislike it, Janet, for I must own that since the night of the fire my feelings toward Richard have undergone a complete change, and it pained me to see your aversion."

Janet blushed: she could not confess the truth. "Did dear papa know of Richard's attachment?" she asked.

"Yes." Her mother spoke thoughtfully. "It seems to me that the knowledge of his own intentions toward Richard made your dear father encourage his visits to Rookstone lately. I see now that he must have planned this marriage from the first."

"Then, mamma," said Janet, impulsively, "ought you not to see his wishes fulfilled as soon as possible? Ought we not to invite Richard to come and see us?"

"At present Mary shrinks from seeing him. There is no hurry, Janet." Mrs. Wolferston smiled. "I believe it is always best to leave lovers to settle their own affairs. I wish I had thought this sooner."

Before Janet could answer, Mrs. Dawson was announced. She was a round, comely-looking lady, between fifty and sixty, with sparkling dark eyes, a good set of teeth, and a profusion of small iron-gray ringlets, which waggled a sort of accompaniment to her frequent bursts of laughter. The sight of Mrs. Wolferston subdued her liveliness to a minor key: "How are you to-day, poor dear? Enjoyed the drive yesterday? That's right! Famous thing for getting spirits right—nothing like it; but it's not you I've come to see—no, nor you either, you poor, pale-faced Janet. Mustn't tell her so, must we?" This in apology to Mrs. Wolferston. "That was a slip of the tongue, was it not? Where's the naughty beauty, as I call her? My visit is to her." Janet went in search of her sister. "Janet will not be coming back, will she?" Mrs. Dawson edged her chair confidentially close to her nephew's widow.

"I don't know," spoken coldly, for,

Aunt Dawson's mysteries were not always to Mrs. Wolferston's taste.

"Oh, if she does, invent some excuse or other to get rid of her. Can't you say she had better lie down a little? I am sure she looks pale enough."

"No"—Mrs. Wolferston smiled in spite of herself—"I would rather tell her you want to tell me something privately."

"Oh no. Why, my dear Amy, you, a mother of two daughters!—really, I must say even an old maid like myself knows better than that."

"I scarcely understand you."

"No, I dare say not, poor thing! You see it is all so sudden and recent, and I'm no doubt premature, and that—only opportunities may come and go, and once gone can't be had back. You understand exactly, I've no doubt, and see the force of things just as I do—so wise you always were, you poor dear bereaved one!"

The "poor dear" looked thoroughly mystified, but she was not to be enlightened directly.

"Ah, here's the beauty!" and Aunt Dawson jumped up nimbly and advanced to meet Mary as she came in. "Now, Miss Careless, guess what I've got for you."

Mary was not in the saucy spirits her aunt expected. "I don't know," she said, simply.

"You'll be losing your head next, or your heart, I shouldn't wonder. Now, look here. I wonder who is the owner of this pretty thing?"

She was fumbling in a capacious pocket, so full of miscellaneous articles that a struggle was inevitable when any one of them had to be extricated. If the sharp-eyed old lady had not been thus occupied, she must have seen how deeply Mary blushed.

"My ear-ring! Oh, where was it found?"

"Ah, only suppose now you had been in a hired fly. I wonder what chance there would have been of your ear-ring coming home again? I have heard"—she dropped her voice to its tone of mystery—"that some of those fly-drivers

make large fortunes by what people drop. But now, Amy, I really want you to listen seriously. Mary's not of the least consequence, because you see she's not a party concerned; but I think you and I must put our wits together a bit and just see that the Rookstone property don't quite slip out of the family."

"But, Mrs. Dawson—"

"Now, my dear, I know what you are going to say as well as if you were a bee in a glass hive. You object to matchmaking, of course, dear, and very right and proper, too, as long as you had a roof over your head and your thousands to spend—and squander. I don't mean any reflections by squander, as you know, my dear Amy; but words come crooked when one feels as I do now." She might have added, "and speaks as fast," for in her excitement ideas flowed so rapidly that she had not words enough to express them, and they came tumbling out in strange, incoherent fashion. "Now, you know, Amy, Janet's quite marriageable, quite. Now don't shake your dear head, and consent to her wasting all the best of her youth in a desert, pining after a wild young officer like Henry Wenlock. Who's to say he is not married by this time? And, my dear, when one reads in the papers of breaches of promise for far less provocation than poor misguided Christopher's will, it seems to me that you should cut the Gordian knot yourself. Write and give him up, and so make an opening for Richard Wolferston."

"But, putting every other consideration aside, Richard Wolferston would never think of marrying Janet."

It was the first pause Mrs. Dawson had come to, and it happened more from want of breath than because she had nearly developed her ideas. "Ah, you see," she said, triumphantly, the iron-gray ringlets dancing with delight, "I should not have come here to-day, dear Amy, rousing you from the memory of the dear departed—for whom I'm sure no one can have a more sincere and hearty respect than myself—I shouldn't have dreamed of coming

here to state a theory: you thought so now, did you not? Ah no, my dear, I could not at such a time—oh no. The fact is, between ourselves”—here she stretched out her short, fat neck till her face nearly touched Mrs. Wolferston's, and jerked out each word with deliberate emphasis—"I saw my gentleman this morning—ascertained his intentions, or affections, or whatever men call the thing they wear under their waistcoats and fancy it's a heart; and if you'll only leave the matter in my hands, Amy dear, I'll undertake to have these young people married and settled before I'm six months older."

"Who are you speaking of, Aunt Dawson?"

"Patience, child! How you startled me, speaking in that solemn, serious way! I declare you gave me quite a turn, Mary. Well, you mustn't go and repeat it to Janet, you know, for of course Richard will like to tell his own story best; but of course you knew all about it long ago. Ah, I thought so! Why, my dear Amy, it is not likely that a man would go rushing into roaring, raging flames as he did to save a mere indifferent life: you couldn't expect me to believe such a thing. But now look here. Couldn't you let me take Janet back with me. Richard has promised to dine with me to-morrow. Now have I not arranged a pleasant little surprise for him? I'd have taken Janet off then and now, without a word to discompose her mind, only it struck me it might be as well to *congé* that tiresome, hot-headed young Wenlock first, and let her start fair with Richard. Don't you think I was right, Amy?"

Mrs. Wolferston could not answer: but for the distress in Mary's face she must have laughed at the good-natured busybody's mistake. The best course to pursue now was to dismiss her before Mary betrayed herself. "Thank you," she said. "I am sure you mean kindly, but Janet is deeply attached to Henry Wenlock; and even if he releases her from her engagement, she is not at all likely to marry any one else. Besides this, I feel quite sure neither she nor

her sister would think of visiting at present."

Mrs. Dawson was vehement in her protest against this decision, but she knew of old that, gentle as dear Amy was, she could be firm also, and she was obliged to go away alone.

CHAPTER XVII.

SETTLED IN HASTE.

DIRECTLY Mrs. Dawson had departed, her mother turned to Mary: "Of course, my dear child, your aunt has made a mistake, and has arrived at an entirely wrong conclusion about Richard."

"I cannot agree with you." The decided words, the abrupt manner were quite unlike spoiled, petted Mary.

"But, Mary—"

"Mamma, it is useless; the foreboding of this has been upon me ever since we left Rookstone. He loved me once—I know that well, I can never forget it—but oh, mamma, mamma, I lost his love"—she hid her face on her mother's shoulder and broke down in violent sobs—"on the night of the fire. He saw the difference between us. You know what a helpless baby I was, and I quite lost my senses at last, and Kitty told me that until the smoke choked her Janet was so brave and calm: it was my cowardice that killed his love, and I suppose saving her as he did drew him to Janet. Now do you see why he gave me up? So many things have become clear to me in these few minutes! Now I know why Janet has grown so suddenly kind about him: she does not love him, but she cannot hate a man who loves her; and she will love him soon, mother: she must—how can she help it?—and then it seems to me I must hate them both."

Mrs. Wolferston soothed and reasoned, but in vain: she persuaded the sobbing, unhappy girl to lie down on a sofa, and then went to find her eldest daughter.

"I wish you had sent for me at once," Janet said when she heard her mother's tidings. "I would have cross-question-

ed Aunt Dawson until I had found out the truth." The tears sprang to her eyes. "It seems as if every day brings some fresh cause of estrangement: till lately, Mary and I were so happy together, and now I dread to be left alone with her."

"In this last matter I believe silence is your best course," said Mrs. Wolferton: "perhaps if we both treat it with entire indifference, Mary may take the same view of the case: she is too much excited just now to judge at all."

"Poor girl! she has had unhappiness enough," said Janet, warmly. "Mamma, will you let me write to Richard? I have never yet thanked him for saving my life: surely I may ask him to come here and let me thank him personally."

Her mother smiled. "I begin to think you are imitating Aunt Dawson," she said; "but do as you like, my darling. I believe only Richard himself can calm Mary now."

Janet wrote, and then she sat counting the hours that must pass before Richard could make his appearance. She tried to cast all doubts and fears away, to tell herself that the marriage was ordained to be, and that therefore neither human right nor might could avail to prevent it; but she could not feel tranquil. The step she had just taken was not a mere resigning herself to the ways of Providence: instead of this, she had resolved on hastening Mary's happiness in her own way henceforth. Come what might of the marriage, humanly speaking, her act had rendered it inevitable.

She did not speak of Henry Wenlock's letter. It seemed to Janet that already her mother's sacred grief had been intruded on by care for others: she ought now to be allowed to give herself up to the seclusion of her own thoughts and memories; and for this reason also she wrote to Mrs. Webb, asking her to keep Christy a week or two longer, till they should be settled in their Brompton home.

There was a small garden—the sort of garden one finds attached to all new villa houses, which answers well

for those who can replenish the flowerbeds as fast as gas and smoke empty them, but which bears as much comparison to a real flower-garden as an ordinary young lady fresh from the milliner's hands does to a beautiful Roman peasant woman in her festa costume. A London garden destroys all sentiment. You look in vain for the plants of last year; you had grown fond of them in your efforts to tend and increase their growth; you find only new-comers, like the "Veneerings," your neighbors, and the shining furniture you see over the way. If you care for old associations—links to the past—avoid an improving London suburb, where the very walks and green lanes dear to your childhood grow into streets with new, high-sounding titles: simplicity and freshness vanish with the daisies and buttercups.

Janet was in this garden, examining some of the plants they had brought with them, when Richard arrived. They had only just breakfasted, and she had not expected him so early. For the moment she felt really glad to see him, and she told him so.

He was touched by the change in her manner. "Where is Mary?" he asked.

"We shall find her in-doors." She did not tell him how unprepared her sister was to see him. Janet's fear had been that Mary would refuse to meet her cousin, or manage in some way to avoid him. The street door was open, and she went in quickly, followed by Richard.

Mary was sitting alone in the little morning-room, her head resting on her hands. She colored when she saw who was Janet's companion, and looked resentfully at her sister.

She made no sign of greeting, and Richard looked at Janet in surprise.

She smiled. "Mary is not well or happy," she said, rather mischievously, "but I think she will be better now;" and Janet went away thinking that Richard would find it easy enough to convince her sister of her mistake.

But it was not an easy matter to get her to listen at all. At first she begged

him to excuse her. She wished for the future only to see him when her mother or Janet was present, and when she found he would not listen she sought refuge in silence.

"Now, Mary"—he took both her hands and held them fast in his—"what have I done to deserve such a reception? I believe you are not in earnest: you are only trying some of your old saucy tricks on me." But when he drew her nearer to him the real sorrow in her eyes showed him she was in earnest.

He tried to soothe her and win her confidence by gentleness. She relapsed into a sort of forced indifference which tried his patience, and his anger rose. He let go her hands, and walked up and down the room. "Mary," he said, frowning, "you are determined to see the worst of me, or you would not use your power over me in this way. I have been living on the thought of your sweetness and your love, feeling as if I could not live without you. I came here as soon as I got Janet's letter: it seemed to me a new life had begun, and you receive me as if I had committed a crime." He stood facing her pale with anger, and Mary grew terrified. "You have promised to be my wife, and till I release you from that promise you are mine," he said, roughly taking her hand again in his strong, firm clasp; "and you are bound to tell me who has been making mischief between us: I insist on knowing. Is it your mother?"

He had touched the right string. She might not have yielded to fear for herself, although she was really afraid of him now, but it would be dreadful for her mother to be frightened by his violence; and, like many another woman, despite his anger, Mary loved him the better for compelling her obedience. She told him Mrs. Dawson's story. His brow cleared as if by magic: he laughed, and then, as if that were his best assurance of truth to her, he drew Mary to his heart and kissed her.

"You are a darling little goose," he said, "and Mrs. Dawson is more silly than I took her to be. It would serve

you rightly if I were really to transfer my love to Janet, don't you think so?"

"I don't know," she sobbed. "I feel as if you must love her best: she is so good and wise, and I am so silly."

"And do you think I should like a wise woman for my wife, Mary—a woman who would lecture and preach against everything not quite right in her eyes? My wife must be mine entirely: her thoughts, her opinions, her wishes, must be mine too. I am a dreadful tyrant, my pet; but I believe you will be the most loving, docile darling a man ever took to himself for his own."

There was almost a fierce earnestness in his words, and she trembled. A vague, faint memory of her mother's warning, that in marrying Richard she would yield up her notions of right and wrong, as well as her love, to his guidance, fell across the purple light of love which a minute before had seemed to penetrate every sensation; but under the spell of his eyes, listening to the fascination of his words, she could neither think nor remember distinctly. He was her idol, her all; and when a little while after he whispered that the only way to make his happiness sure would be a speedy marriage, Mary forgot her mother's grief, her own deep mourning, and let him take her consent for granted.

He asked to see Mrs. Wolferston. She looked pained when he told her that only her consent was wanting now to the celebration of their marriage. The wedding should be as quiet and private as she pleased, but he hoped she would allow it to take place immediately.

"I think this haste is cruel," she said: "why not wait till Mary is a year older? You shall see her as often and with as little restraint as you wish."

He entreated and argued, and Mrs. Wolferston already found it difficult to refuse him, when, to her surprise, she found Janet ranked on his side.

She had joined Mary when Richard left her, had gathered the purpose of his errand to her mother, and, deciding in her usual firm way, had come to the

conclusion that her mother would have no quiet or seclusion so long as these lovers' quarrels were likely to recur. Janet only lived for her mother now. She was angry with Mary for being able to think of marrying at such a time. "But if she can do so already," thought the eldest sister, "she will always be fretting and discontented unless Richard is here. They had better be married at once."

At once, according to Janet, meant in three months' time, a period which Richard's persuasions curtailed to two. He did not leave the widow till she had promised that the marriage should take place that day two months.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE RETURN HOME.

A YEAR passed away. The monotony of Mrs. Wolferston's and Janet's life was only interrupted by Mary's letters, full of her fresh and delighted experience of foreign travel. Directly after the marriage, Richard had taken his young wife to Italy, and they had lingered there month after month, although Mr. Painson was continually urging on the new squire the importance of making himself thoroughly well known and popular among his tenantry.

Till the wedding was over, Mrs. Wolferston had borne up so wonderfully that even good-natured Mrs. Dawson had shaken her head, and thought that poor dear Amy had less feeling than she had given her credit for; nay, in a burst of confidence to Mrs. Webb she had even hinted that she was afraid old Painson was looking after the widow already, and that his attentions did much to keep up her spirits. But the good soul only chattered thoughtlessly, and felt sorry for her outpourings when she got home, after the fashion of impulsive females, while Mrs. Webb felt a calm satisfaction in repeating a slander not invented by herself. But before a week had passed, Time, the usual avenger of injustice, had silenced Mrs. Webb.

Mrs. Wolferston was seriously ill, and the London physician whom Janet

insisted on calling in to consult with Mrs. Dawson's doctor declared that only care and time could restore her, and even then she must be very tenderly dealt with. The anguish she had so bravely struggled against had brought to light or life inward weakness, and he said that although there was no actual disease of the heart at present, there was that which made it imperative that Mrs. Wolferston should be spared any fatigue or sudden emotion.

Janet did not write this news to Mary. The young girl's aim in the life she had planned for herself was to bear her own burdens alone—a good plan enough for a fretful, complaining woman, but one which has its evils in such a nature as Janet's. She grew silent, and less and less communicative in her replies to Mary's bright, amusing letters: confidence was gradually diminishing between the sisters, and it was Janet's fault. To her mother and little Christy she was all they could wish, but this constant effort at self-reliance had made her years older.

She softened when at length an answer came to her letter to Henry Wenlock. "What matters the loss of money," he wrote, after many expressions of sympathy for her sorrow, "to people who love each other as you and I do, my own Janet? I shall be in England, I hope, next September: then I shall sell my commission and get some more profitable employment, and your good, kind mother will give you to me as soon as I have made a home for you."

Captain Wenlock would have wondered if he could have seen the burst of tears his letter evoked, but these brought comfort and solace to the overburdened spirit. It was not for ever, then, that she should have to walk thus alone and unaided. In a few months she should have Henry to look to for guidance and sympathy, though she could not marry him while her mother lived—her desolate mother, who had only her to rest on now.

Mary had told Mrs. Wolferston that she hoped to become a mother early

in October: it was now August, and still they did not return to England.

But one morning, soon after the beginning of the month, Janet came into her mother's sitting-room with her hands full of letters. She was laughing, and seemed unusually animated. "What will you give me for my news?" she said, half fearing lest its suddenness might bring on one of the fainting-fits her mother had lately suffered from. "It is very surprising, but very pleasant; but the outside of the letters will tell their own story. Here is one from Mary, with a Geneva postmark: this one is from Richard, dated Paris; and now where do you think this comes from?"

"Are they indeed at Rookstone? Ah, Janet, I can scarcely tell you how thankful I am for dear Mary's sake."

"Yes, they reached Rookstone two days ago, and that is not all: Mary wants you to go to her at once; but, mother, if you have any shrinking from this visit I can easily take your place."

But Mrs. Wolferston was eager to go herself. In the joy of seeing her darling again after this long separation she forgot the pain all the old memories would suffer in this sudden rekindling.

Janet felt secretly indignant that Richard should have taken her sister home without staying even one day in London with her mother, but when she hinted this, Mrs. Wolferston said it was gratifying to her to see his anxiety that Mary should be spared fatigue. "Why, you see, dear, he has even written this last note himself, to save her trouble."

Janet did not answer: she thought it would have been more natural for Mary to have written and to have included herself and Christy in the invitation; but she had resolved not to harbor evil thoughts of Richard, and she went up stairs to pack her mother's trunk, as Mrs. Wolferston was asked to go to Rookstone as soon as possible.

She had grown so much stronger during the last few months that even Janet felt no anxiety in allowing her to make the journey only accompanied by a maid.

Richard Wolferston met his mother-in-law at the railway station. He looked aged: she thought his face had grown lined and anxious. "I thought Mary had better meet you in-doors," he said: "the idea of your visit has made her hysterical;" and then so grave almost stern a look came into his face that Mrs. Wolferston felt an uneasy restraint creep over her.

As they approached Rookstone she sank back in the carriage and drew her thick veil more closely over her face. She had not been outside the gates between that eventful night and the day of her departure, and every hedge-bank, every well-known group of trees, gave a fresh pang to the still keen sense of bereavement.

Here were the sprigs of wild clematis he had gathered for her to draw or in their early married days had wreathed round her hat; there were the cottages his liberal hand had restored from decay; and here—ah! here, indeed, was a poignant remembrance—the toll-house where on that sad night doubt had grown so strong—the doubt of her husband's safety. All that night came back to her with terrible reality: all her bitter anguish was renewed.

Richard turned to her abruptly: "I dare say Mary will tell you I wanted your visit deferred: the truth is, of course I am very anxious about Mary, and I was afraid this first coming back would depress and agitate you; and, frankly, it will annoy me greatly if my wife is in any way upset."

His tone was not unkind, but still she could not help shrinking from his words: even her gentle spirit roused to wonder why Richard should imagine her less careful of her daughter than he was of his wife. "But it is only his great love for her," she said to herself: "surely I should not complain of that, and he could not know how sad I am."

They were driving in at the great gates—not the entrance by which we saw Richard Wolferston go in more than a year ago. These gates were on the other side of the park, much nearer the house. Mrs. Wolferston looked to-

ward the house. Could this be Mary standing on the steps?—a beautiful woman dressed in the latest fashion, her hair so frizzled out of any resemblance to nature that her mother could hardly think it was her own.

She laughed and cried, and was so excited that Mrs. Wolferston could scarcely quiet her: in her heart she felt thankful that Richard had left them together: he would certainly have thought that her presence agitated Mary.

But after a little the girl's old bright, saucy self came back, and she was nestling her head on her mother's shoulder and kissing her as if she were still a child. "You will find the house so changed," she said: "I have not grown used to it yet. All our own sleeping-rooms have been rebuilt, and they are not a bit like the old ones. Will you like to see the room I have chosen for you? It is close to my own."

Mary rang the bell. Mrs. Wolferston looked in hopes to see a familiar face—she had remarked that the servants she had already seen were strangers—but a moustached foreigner answered Mary's summons.

"Send Eulalie."

"Is your maid French?" asked her mother.

"Oh yes: Richard prefers foreign servants. He says they are so much quicker-witted; so that, except coachmen, grooms and housemaids, we have nothing but French and German people about us."

Mrs. Wolferston had resolved not to volunteer an unasked opinion on any changes she might observe, but there was something in this thorough break-up of old associations which pained her. Most of the Rookstone servants had been there for years.

In some ways, perhaps, it was less trying that her new rooms did not remind her of the past: this was no longer her Rookstone, and when she came down to dinner she felt like a visitor in a strange house.

Richard was courteous, but his cold, watchful manner threw a constraint over everything. Mrs. Wolferston longed

for dinner to be over to find herself once more alone with Mary, but this was not to be.

To her surprise, he followed them almost immediately into the saloon. Nothing was changed here: even the new squire's fastidious taste had seen no need of alteration.

He came up to Mary: "I thought your mother would like a stroll in the park: there is still some light left. What do you think of it?"

Mrs. Wolferston was in hopes her daughter would have elected to remain in-doors, but Richard's slightest wish was law to his wife, and she seemed to think there was no doubt of her mother's acquiescence.

They strolled down the terrace steps, where the peacocks, all unconscious of any change of masters, strutted about, only thinking of themselves. At the edge of the lake, Richard was turning to the right, so as to climb the higher ground on the other side, which commanded a view of the house, when Mrs. Wolferston stopped. "I should like to see Kitty Robbins," she said: "I suppose she is still at the lodge?"

A dark shadow crossed Richard's face, and Mary looked frightened and nervous: "Oh, never mind now, dear mamma: Kitty is such a nasty, cross old thing, and—"

"Mary"—she checked herself suddenly at the sound of her husband's voice—"you are not going to see Mrs. Robbins: why do you interfere with your mother's wishes?"

Mrs. Wolferston looked from one to the other: she felt certain that Richard had forbidden his wife to hold any communication with the faithful old dependant, and her spirit rose against what seemed to her tyranny. "I'll go alone, Mary," she said. "I think poor old Kitty will feel hurt if I do not pay her an early visit."

"Very well," Richard Wolferston answered, "we will wait for you here: you will not be gone long, I dare say?" It seemed as if he implied "you must not," in spite of the courteous tone in which the words were spoken.

Mrs. Wolferston turned toward Kitty's cottage. The dark fears which at one time had influenced her so strongly against Richard Wolferston came back with overwhelming force. The bright, happy tone of Mary's letters had effectually quieted any lingering remains of these fears, and the sunshine in Mary's face had confirmed her mother's belief that Richard had proved a tender, indulgent husband, for she knew her daughter could not be happy unless she were petted and treated lovingly. But something in Richard's tone startled her: it was much like that of a master to an unreasoning child, and yet it seemed not to pain or perplex Mary. Why was she not allowed to visit old Kitty? For a moment Mrs. Wolferston had nearly turned back and asked her daughter to go with her. "But I resolved not to stir up strife between them," she said, "and I believed he would refuse to let her accompany me."

CHAPTER XIX.

KITTY'S WARNING.

THE light had faded quickly, and when Mrs. Wolferston stooped to enter the low cottage door the room was in darkness, except for the smouldering log on the hearth.

Seeing a visitor, but not making out who it was, Kitty got up briskly and struck at the half-burned wood. The sparks flew out in all directions: then, stooping down, the old woman took a few shavings from a heap in the corner, and in a moment, as if by magic, the little room was filled with bright, ruddy light.

The red glare flickered over Kitty's face as she turned sideways to peer at her visitor. She looked something like what we fancy the old witch of a fairy story; but a gleam of hearty, unfeigned delight, such as no witch's face ever glowed with, spread over hers when she recognized her visitor.

"Well, to be sure! Be it ee'self as is come back? Jem, he said summat on't, but him be a rare gawk at news, and I just bid he hold his idle talk.

Will'ee please sit ye down, Madam Wolferston? Ah! it wur a sad day for Rookstone when ye left it. Have 'ee brought Master Christy to see t'old place?"

"No, I came alone. My daughter, Mrs. Wolferston, is not well enough to bear the fatigue of much company."

Kitty groaned: "Not well, beant her? What call has her to look for health or welfare either, I'd like to know, flying in the face of a solemn warning?"

Mrs. Wolferston looked puzzled. She felt inclined to check Kitty, and yet the old woman's manner was too earnest not to be impressive. Kitty grew more and more excited as she went on: "I warned she as if her wur my own child. I telled she yon squoire were naught for a 'ooman to trust to; and Mary beant a 'ooman—she be naught but a ungrown gal. More the pity for 'ee, Madam Wolferston, she be so untamed like; for they do tell I 'ee never liked the match, but they young folk wur too strong for 'ee. Bless us! I know what they sort o' gals be—easy enough to drive when they be coupled, but as hard-mouthed as colts when they be single. He'll know how to guide she, let him be for that!"

"You have been misinformed, Kitty." Mrs. Wolferston spoke very coldly: she thought the conversation better ended. "I was willing that my daughter should marry Richard Wolferston."

A cry of astonishment burst from Kitty before her visitor had finished speaking: "I ha' heerd o' witchcraft and other tomfooleries, an' I put 'em aside for idle talk. I a'most think there be summat o' that in Richard Wolferston, or he'd not ha' glamour'd the mother as well as the darter. Nobut yeeself," she went on, slowly shaking her head, "would ha' made I believe a quiet, sober, godly lady as 'ee be, Madam Wolferston, would uphold such awful ways and practices as goes on at Rookstone now."

"Well, Kitty, I came to see you, and to hear about your rheumatism and Jem; but if you can only find fault with Mr. Wolferston, I must go away."

Mrs. Wolferston rose as she spoke. The old woman's words had increased the dark fears and forebodings Richard had reawakened; but it was impossible to listen to any gossip about Rookstone.

To her surprise, Kitty laid her hand on her arm. "Dwoant 'ee bring Master Christy here, then," she cried in a shrill, eager voice. "Maybe him 'ull get tainted wi' all they new-fangled nos-siuns—no prayers, no church-gwoing. Oh, Madam Wolferston, ye may have changed, tho' I can't credit such a falling away; but what would the dear squire heself say—him as wur so right-minded—to see a lot o' cursing Frenchmen and drinking German chaps drivin' the whole village wild with they doin's?"

"It can be no business of yours or mine." Mrs. Wolferston was much moved by the old woman's earnestness, although she strove not to show it. "Remember, Kitty, that they have only been home a fortnight, and have not got into regular ways yet. Now I must say good-night, for it grows dark."

"Well, madam"—Kitty opened the door reluctantly—"there be they as won't see and they as can't—they as natur blinds and they as blinds they-selves. But one word I will speak, though all the world wur striving to keep my mouth shut. I beant one of they sort as dumbs my tongue when it ought to be waggin'. Yon squire's a dark man, wi' more bad in he than good. I don't say what the bad be—I hanna found out; but he'd not ha' nourished bad blood agen an old creature like I if I hadna somehow hit the right nail on the head in what I said to Miss Mary. Look ye here, Madam Wolferston! The real squire—him as was kind by young and old alike—never meant to cast his little fair-headed boy on the world without a home over his head—nor you neither. I'm only a stupid old 'ooman, maybe as sour as a crab, some folks say; but I beant a shiftless 'ooman as leaves her work unfinished. My life, maybe, wonna last long enough, but while it lasts I beant a-gwoin' to rest till I ha' made out summat more about yon Richard Wolfer-

ston than he gives out. He's more than one story hid under that black head o' hisn."

"Good-night! I must go;" and Mrs. Wolferston hurried away, too much disturbed and bewildered for any settled thought till she rejoined Mary, and then her daughter's smiling, happy face seemed to give a decided negative to Kitty's dark warnings.

She felt pained when, coming down early next morning, she was told by the bearded Frenchman who seemed to act as major-domo that there would be no use in waiting breakfast—monsieur and madame always took coffee in their rooms.

Mary appeared about eleven o'clock, full of apologies: she had got into bad habits abroad, but she hoped to do better; and then, seemingly afraid of this topic, she flew off like a bird to all sorts of desultory talk, and won her mother to listen, though her heart was aching at what she felt was a want of confidence between them.

Sunday came next day, and Mary's maid tapped at Mrs. Wolferston's door soon after breakfast: "Would madame wish the carriage to go to church in?"

"No, thank you, unless your mistress usually drives to church."

The Frenchwoman shook her head: "Madame did not go to church, but she had thought that her mamma would find the walk much too fatiguing."

Mrs. Wolferston repeated that she preferred walking, and the smart maid departed.

Never went to church! But this was probably a hazarded assertion—the maid perhaps had not been long in their service: this was only Mary's third Sunday in England—she might have felt ill or tired.

But these excuses brought no comfort, and there was something in the warm greeting she met with after service was over from the clergyman and his flock which made her aware that faces from the park were rare in the village.

She went back to Rookstone sad and anxious. Janet, she knew, would have

spoken out her thoughts and remonstrated with her sister, but her mother hesitated. Richard had specially told her that his wife was easily agitated, and it seemed impossible to open such a subject without giving Mary some amount of pain; and this Mrs. Wolferston, in her tender longing not to alienate the child who seemed so anxious for her affection, could not make up her mind to give.

Should she speak to Richard? She did not know why—whether from the effect of Kitty's words or from the restraint his formal, courteous manner had created—but Mrs. Wolferston became suddenly aware, when she asked herself this question, that she had grown afraid of her son-in-law: she noticed, too, how seldom he left her alone with Mary.

He might be capable of separating them entirely if she interfered with his opinions; and yet was a mother to give up all right of influence over so young a girl as Mary, knowing as she did the utter incapacity of her husband to help her in these ways? And Mary was about to become a mother! Mrs. Wolferston had heard that those who give up appointed ordinances are apt to fall into careless ways about private ones. A prayerless mother! This idea was terrible, and when she at length slept her night was disturbed and restless.

She awoke with that strange sense of impending misfortune we all know so well: Kitty's words came back much more vividly. She knew Kitty to be a clever, energetic and persevering woman. It was terrible to think that she would henceforth be a perpetual spy on Mary's husband; and Mrs. Wolferston could not hide from herself the conviction that probably in his life in California there had been episodes which Richard might wish to remain unknown. The hints about the will had not troubled her. She always clung to the remembrance of that interrupted conversation with her husband as a safeguard against doubts or murmurs. He had thought Richard's father unjustly disinherited, and he had resolved that Christy should

not entail a curse on himself by possessing what was rightfully the property of another man.

But the arrival of the post entirely changed the current of her thoughts. Janet wrote that Henry Wenlock might be expected any day; and although she did not ask her mother to shorten her visit, Mrs. Wolferston felt how much comfort her sympathy would be in these anxious days of expectation.

When Mary came down stairs her mother told her Janet's news.

"I believe, my dear child, I ought to go home at once. Poor girl! she has no one but me to share her joy with."

Mary burst into passionate weeping: her mother tried to calm her, but it was useless. "You don't love me: no one loves me but Richard," she sobbed; "and he will not love me long, for I have teased him and made him angry. I know why you are going: you think me so wicked because I try to obey and please my husband; but, mother, it is cruel of you to punish me for this."

"But, Mary, what have I said or done?"

"I know," she said. "I was watching you the first evening: I begged him so hard before you came just to let things be as they used to be, and he said it would be acting a falsehood, and he would not have shams in his house—he is so true and noble, mother, he could not; and when I begged him hard, he went away angrily and said I was hysterical; and, mamma, mamma, I know if I were to try and please you by going to church and all that, it would not only make unhappiness between him and me, but he would never let me see you again."

A slight flush came into her mother's face: "I think and hope you wrong your husband, Mary; but if you feel yourself that you have acted wrongly in giving up these things, surely you are in great peril: we have nowhere a warrant to let human love or human duty come between us and that which we feel to be necessary to us. I am not speaking to you as I might speak: I am not urging you to disobey your husband, if

it is indeed possible that he has forbidden you a religious mode of life; but I only tell you to listen attentively to the fears and misgivings which I can see beset you: they are not idle scruples, my darling."

But Mary's agitation had become uncontrollable: it seemed as if something in her mother's words had moved her beyond endurance. One hysterical sob succeeded another, and Mrs. Wolferston was growing seriously alarmed when Richard came abruptly into the room.

CHAPTER XX.

SQUIRE CHRISTOPHER'S STUDY.

RICHARD WOLFERSTON looked sternly at his mother-in-law and then at Mary, but he did not speak.

"Ah, Richard," his wife sobbed, "mamma is going away from me already."

"How can you be such a baby?" he said, coldly. "I thought the post must have brought some very distressing news." He glanced at the letter on the table. "Surely you don't wish to force your mother to stay against her will?"

His words had a magical effect on Mary, but the tone jarred Mrs. Wolferston. She looked up at him: there was that cold, cynical sneer on his face which had at first alienated her from him.

"Willingness is not in question," she said, "but I find we may daily expect Captain Wenlock's arrival, and I think I ought to be with Janet."

"I am the last person who would willingly interfere with your notions of duty." He spoke with such studied politeness that it seemed to Mrs. Wolferston he was really angry, but she feared to agitate Mary by any explanation.

Mary had dried her eyes, and sat quiet and subdued till her husband asked her to execute some commission which obliged her to leave the room. Both mother and daughter felt that he did this on purpose, and as their eyes met the glance of suppressed alarm in each made them strangely alike. But Mrs. Wolferston's fear was only momentary: she rose to follow Mary.

Richard had turned away to the window, but he knew of her movement instantly. "I want you to look here, Mrs. Wolferston," he said quietly, without so much as a glance toward her: "you know the value of those oak trees as well as I do, and Painson wants to persuade me to cut them down." He spoke with that unruffled calm which always gives its owner an advantage over more impulsive, sensitive natures.

Instead of following Mary, she came and stood beside him. His forced manner left him at once: he kept her there talking for half an hour about the park and the trees, Captain Wenlock and his prospects, till she almost felt toward him as she had felt during the days of his short engagement to Mary, when he had won her to look upon him with real affection and confidence.

Suddenly he broke off the conversation: "I forget if you said when you would like the carriage to take you."

"I had not specified any time: I was just settling my departure when you came in, but I have no wish to leave Mary abruptly."

"You are always unselfish, I know," he smiled, "but whenever you go the poor child will feel it sadly: will it not be better to make one business of it and return to town this afternoon? I will order the carriage to be ready to meet the four-o'clock train."

He left the room before she could answer, and Mrs. Wolferston felt greatly bewildered. His manner had been frank and kind, winning even, and yet there was something so decided in his proposal, something which she felt herself so powerless to resist, that it was difficult to believe that he had not snatched at a pretext for separating her from Mary.

A sudden fear came upon her as she remembered his harshly-spoken warning on her way to Rookstone. Was he going to punish her for the agitation which he had witnessed in his wife, and to separate them for ever? And as the idea mastered her, with almost a wild terror she resolved to see Mary at once, and, if she found her urgent for her stay, to

remain at Rookstone a few days longer. If Richard's manner had been truthful, if he really liked her as much as he had implied, he could have no wish to hasten her departure. She knocked at the door of Mary's room: there was no answer, and when she knocked again, Richard himself opened it. "You want Mary?" he said in a low voice. "I have persuaded her to lie down in her dressing-room. I have told her as gently as possible that you are going to town this afternoon: I did this to save you another scene, but, as I suspected, she had imagined that you intended to leave Rookstone to-day, and I think she is ashamed of having so distressed you."

His words were gently and smilingly spoken, and yet they fell like a stone on the hope which had been struggling with all Mrs. Wolferton's dark doubts and fears. As he closed the door and she passed along the gallery, she felt half tempted to go into the dressing-room and see whether Mary was kept there against her will. It was only a momentary thought. Had she not resolved never to stir up strife between the husband and wife? Mary belonged more to Richard than to herself now: it was bitter to yield her child up to his guidance, but what could she do? Open remonstrance to him respecting his opinions would, she felt certain, ensure the separation she so greatly dreaded. All she could trust to was the influence affection gave her over Mary, and prayer that a better, higher life than the mere earthly existence they seemed to lead at present might yet be in store for her erring children.

Mary came down only a little while before her mother's departure: her husband followed almost directly.

She looked as if she had been crying, but she was calm and composed as she said good-bye: the strained clasp in which she held her mother alone told how deeply she felt this parting.

Her husband drew her hand into his arm and led her back into the saloon before the carriage was out of sight.

"That is brave and good," and he kissed her.

But she did not answer: for the first time since their marriage he felt that she received his praise and his tenderness passively, almost with coldness.

At another moment his strong power of self-control would have enabled him to appear unconscious, but self-reproach usually makes a man irritable, and Mrs. Wolferton's sad yearning eyes, as they took their last look at Mary, haunted him. "What is the matter now?" He spoke so sternly that his wife started. "Really my patience begins to wear out: one minute I find you in an agony of sobs and tears at the bare idea of losing your mother, and when I try to comfort you, you repulse me."

"Oh, Richard!" and then the facile, easily-moved nature broke down, its momentary anger melting in tears.

She did not know what was the matter with her: it seemed as if all her happiness had gone. She had behaved foolishly to her mother, and now she had made her darling husband angry. All this came in little bursts of penitent misery between her sobs: finally, she believed it would be much better if she died, and then Richard could marry a really good wife and be happy.

For a moment the cloud left her husband's face. "Come, come," he said, pettingly, "you are in a hurry to settle matters: we won't talk about a new wife till I'm tired of you, my pet; but I think for the future you will be more inclined to be guided by me than by your own inclinations."

These last words were gravely spoken, and he rose from the couch beside her and stood while she answered, "I don't know what you mean: I thought you always guided me."

He seemed uneasy: he took a turn up and down the room before he spoke again: "Your memory is worse than I thought it. I can hardly think you have forgotten the answer I made you when you urged me to let you ask your mother to Rookstone."

"I remember that, of course, but I don't see what it has had to do with my unhappiness."

He threw his head back with a quick,

impatient movement: "I should have thought it needed no application. I told you that a mother-in-law always breeds quarrels in a household—not from any fault, but from the natural jealousy she feels of her daughter's husband: you would not believe me, and perhaps it is as well that I allowed you to convince yourself."

"But, Richard, it is an entire mistake. Mamma never said a word to me until I spoke to her, and then what she did say was only what my conscience tells me if I listen to its—"

"Conscience, Mary! Have I not told you that I detest cant of any sort? And this conscience of yours"—he laid a sneering emphasis on the word—"seems to me to be very one-sided in its tellings. You promised me that if I would consent to your mother's visit you would hold no conversation with her on this special subject, and yet you say you began it yourself. Does your 'conscience' tell nothing about disobedience to your husband?"

He looked fixedly at her: to his surprise she sat quiet, without showing any of the impulsive sorrow he had expected. He had thought himself so thoroughly master of this loving nature's moods that he felt as disconcerted as a showman feels when he pulls the wrong strings of a puppet.

Mary pressed her hands tightly together before she spoke—a half-bewildered, half-imploring look came into her face: "I do not know: it is all confusion again. While mamma talked to me, light seemed to come into my mind. It was as if I caught sight of things I have been blind to since I left Rookstone, and it almost made me want to go back to the old life again. But it must be right to love and obey you, Richard. Why did I feel, when you spoke just now, as if I should follow inclination and not duty in obeying you?"

His face had grown very pale, and a nervous twitch about the mouth more than once betrayed a desire to interrupt her, but he waited till she had finished—waited while she sat there pale, with those soft imploring eyes raised to his.

She did not guess what a tempest she had raised. He almost trembled with passion when he found that all the subtle sophistries with which, aided by his real tenderness, he had lulled Mary's religious—or, as he called them, superstitious—scruples to sleep, had been swept away by a single conversation, and that deep down in his wife's heart the root of all this "folly and nonsense" was as firm as ever. If he had answered her in the heat of anger it might have been better for both, but he dared not: with all his tyranny he dreaded the power that his passionate love for his wife gave her over him: he must have time for thought.

"I will come back to you in a moment," he said, and then he went into the room on the left, which had been the late squire's study.

It was no one's room now: it had been left untouched since that sad evening, and there was something almost ghostly in the sight of that tall, high-backed chair in front of the davenport.

It was plain that Richard Wolferston thought so, for a perceptible shudder ran through him as he stood still in the middle of the room, his eyes strained on the chair as if he were striving to picture his lost cousin in his accustomed place. For a few minutes he stood spelled by the painful remembrance: then his eyes wandered listlessly over the room till they fixed themselves on the davenport: a start, a shock of sudden remembrance, and he went hurriedly to it and tried all the drawers, one after another: all were locked, but the key was in the top drawer on the right-hand side. He took this out and put it in his pocket.

He turned quickly to the door. As he reached it something seemed to occur to him: he went back to the davenport, raised the lid of the desk and placed the key of the drawer inside.

Then the same horror returned that had possessed him on his entrance: he hurried to the study door, locked it on the outside and put the key in his pocket.



PART IV.

CHAPTER XXI.

RICHARD WOLFERSTON'S JOURNEY.

MARY had felt too wretched about this first serious dispute with her husband to recur voluntarily to anything likely to revive it; so that when he returned to the saloon and asked her to come and sit beside the lake with him, she was only too glad to throw herself into the old happy life again, unclouded by doubts and misgivings.

Her mother's words came back with a vividness that now and then startled her; and then, with the sophistry which comes so easily when it finds us inclined to receive its teaching, she told herself that Richard was a good man, and, except in this one matter, neglect of the ordinances of religion, he led a blameless life. Why should he not be as right as her father and mother had been? His creed was, so far as she could discover it, that the abundant love which created us intended us to live free and unshackled by any forced service of prayer or praise; but she was vague on the subject of her husband's opinions. He had taught her in her first days of their married life that a woman who could argue seriously, or even think deeply, was unfeminine and unlovable, and this had hitherto checked any effort she had felt impelled to make toward discussion: her foreign life had helped to make her careless. The uncertain and short-lived nature of their household arrangements—for they had rarely remained more than a month in one spot—had precluded any attempt, even if she had felt inclination to make one, at order in her own way of passing time. Hitherto, hers had been a *dolce far niente* existence, full of love and sun-

shine, her mind animated and amused, and her memory stored with variety of scenery, with famous pictures and statues and sights. She had scarcely had a moment for serious thought till she settled into the old life at Rookstone.

Even before her mother's visit, in those few intensely quiet, uneventful days succeeding her return, she had been conscious of a secret discontent. She had thought Richard's absence caused it, and already she regretted they had come back. Abroad there had been no one to take him from her side. At Rookstone, the bailiff, or the steward, or the gamekeeper, or some other, as she considered, troublesome person, was always on the watch to deprive her of her husband.

After Mrs. Wolferston's departure this had mended, and to her joy Mary found that her husband rarely left her. He had never shown himself so tender, so caressing, as during these last few days, and hour by hour her mother's influence grew fainter and its memory farther off.

One morning he came into the charming little room he had built for her special occupation on the site of one of those consumed by the fire—a room filled with the art-treasures his good taste had collected for her during their foreign travel; for Richard Wolferston possessed eminently the gift, call it by what name you will, which marks out the man of true taste from the mere amasser of objects of art. To him price and rarity were alike indifferent: he worshiped the beautiful, and if the object he saw fulfilled its requirements it must be his immediately. As he came in he glanced over the letter in his hand. The troubled look on his face alarmed his wife. In a moment she was cling-

ing to his arm, her heart beating fast and her eyes filled with eager inquiry.

"Nothing to be frightened at, my own darling; only a dreary prospect for both of us. What will you say now if I tell you I must go away for a whole week?"

"Oh, Richard, I should die—indeed I should. I could not live a week without you."

He drew her closer to him. "It is not worse for you than for me," he said fondly, "but I am afraid it must be. Just a year ago I promised Lord Seton to spend the first week of September with him, and I must keep my word. Now, Mary"—she had hidden her face between both her hands—"you do not believe that it is for the sake of slaughtering a few miserable birds that I am willing to leave you—I need not leave Rookstone to do that—but if I mean to be an English landholder I must follow Painson's advice, though the old rascal forgot his place when he gave it: I must improve my position."

"You say you only live for me," she murmured, hiding her eyes on his shoulder, for tears were gathering rapidly: "if I am satisfied with you, why need you care about others?"

He looked vexed for a moment, and then he smiled: "It is for you, you darling little unbeliever, that I undertake this journey to Scotland. You don't suppose I mean you to follow your mother's example, and spend all the best and brightest part of your life at Rookstone? I want other people to know how lovely my darling is—people who can appreciate beauty and grace a little more correctly than our beef-and-mutton-eating country squires and their awkward, red-armed daughters. I mean you to spend next spring in London, but at your age you must be under the wing of some great lady or other, and either Lady Seton or the Duchess of Moray, her mother-in-law, is exactly the person to do you justice and give you the prestige you deserve. I only wish you could go with me now."

Her foreign life had cured Mary of the little shyness she had by nature, and there was something in this brilliant

prospect that took her fancy. She looked up smiling, and then a sudden new thought checked her: "But I am afraid you are going to take all this trouble for nothing: there will be my dear little baby to think of next spring."

He laughed: "It is high time, I see, to put you under Lady Seton's care. When shall I teach you that everything is made for our enjoyment, not to fetter and torment us? We shall leave the baby in safe hands at Rookstone—far happier than it could be with such a very experienced mother in London. Now look bright and happy again, my own darling. Have I not always smoothed all your little troubles away for you?"

What could she do but listen and believe while he explained to her all his plans for their future life in England?—a life which seemed to Mary more like a peep into Fairyland than anything real. Richard had taught her that she possessed unusual loveliness, and she could not help sharing in his desire to display her beauty to the world.

Finally, she agreed cheerfully to his journey to Scotland. He was to start the next day, Monday, and to return the following Saturday.

"It will be very, very lonely, though," and a thought which she dared not utter set her lips quivering.

He had expected her to speak it, but till now he had resolved not to lead the way. Somehow the tender, trembling mouth made him suddenly weak: "I know what you are thinking, Mary—that you ought to have your mother or your sister to comfort you in my absence, but you are too good to wish to disturb them now. Captain Wenlock must either have just arrived or he must be expected to arrive at any moment."

"Yes, I know, only if—if I should be ill, Richard, or—"

"Ill! You are looking as bright as a rose, and you are too good to fret yourself ill: besides, you have only to send me a telegram and I should be with you in twelve hours; but"—he laughed, though he looked uneasy—"why should you think of illness? Illness does not visit youth and beauty like yours with-

out a cause. Come, I want you in the flower-garden."

He started early next morning on his Scotch journey, and Mary was so brave at saying good-bye that the disquiet her words had roused faded quickly from his mind. Ambitions, thoughts and plans took possession of him; and although every now and then he remembered his darling's loneliness, still it was only a momentary idea, conveying no real sensation of uneasiness.

Mary stood looking after the carriage, and then she went back into the saloon, and hiding her face among the cushions of a sofa, she sobbed as if she could never be comforted. "It is not only losing Richard," she said—"that is bad enough; but there is something worse, though I dared not tell him. While he is here he keeps away those teasing, tormenting thoughts, because I am always with him; but now, all alone, what shall I do to get away from them? If he had not forbidden me, I would go and see old Kitty. She amused me even when she was cross. At any rate, if I meet her I may speak to her."

She had hesitated before she said the last words, but they seemed to cheer her. She rang for her hat, and then went down the terrace steps in the direction of a copse that stretched away behind Kitty's cottage and skirted the edge of the park.

CHAPTER XXII.

TWO TELEGRAMS.

ON the morning of Richard's departure for Scotland there was great excitement at the Brompton villa. A telegram came to Janet from Captain Wenlock at Southampton. He would be with them as soon as he could follow the message; but morning passed, and then afternoon, and still he had not come.

At length there was the welcome sound of a cab stopping before the gate. Janet ran to the window. The cabman had opened the door, and Mrs. Webb got out of the vehicle.

"Oh, mother"—Janet clasped her hands vehemently—"it is not Henry;

it is Mrs. Webb. She will be here when he comes: what shall we do with her?"

Before her mother could answer, Mrs. Webb was announced. She greeted her cousins with a series of kisses on the cheek: "So you have a telegram from Henry Wenlock? I am glad to know he is coming back at last. He has not hurried himself, has he, Janet? But I fancy, for those who like it, India is an attractive residence. When did he say he should be with you?"

The question was addressed to Janet, but she left her mother to answer it.

"He did not specify any time," said Mrs. Wolferston. "I think it possible he will stay to get some of his baggage cleared before he leaves Southampton."

Mrs. Webb laughed: she had one of those small metallic laughs that remind one irresistibly of a cracked bell: "Then you won't see him for a week, Amy. There is so much vexatious delay in clearing this Indian baggage. My notion was that a person in Captain Wenlock's position—a significant look at Janet pointed her meaning—"would be far too impatient to trouble himself about baggage. I should have thought, you know"—another little stinging laugh—"that he would have made himself quite ridiculous in his hurry to get to town."

Mrs. Wolferston tried to turn the conversation to Mrs. Webb's husband and daughter.

"Ah, John's quite well, thank you—looking forward already to his holiday: he is thinking of Venice this year by way of the Tyrol. It is charming to know that he has so much enjoyment, is it not? I really rejoice in it."

Janet looked up sharply. There was very little sympathy between her and her mother's cousin: "What do you rejoice in—his absence?"

"Oh dear, no—not likely I should do that. When you come to have a husband, Janet, you will understand the trial of separation; but of course a woman is a mere nobody and nothing beside her husband, and if he enjoys himself she ought to be quite content."

"That is not my notion of married

happiness," said Janet. "It seems to me it must be mutual."

Mrs. Webb nodded her head with another provoking laugh: "Ah, but you see you have no real experience yet. Those sorts of ideas are very pretty and charming, but you have a little worldly wisdom to learn, my dear: nothing like it, you may depend, for checking disappointment afterward."

"I don't understand you," said Janet, hotly. She tried not to dislike Mrs. Webb, but she always came out of any discussion with her mother's cousin sore and worsted.

"Well, I mean, dear, that some girls have such exaggerated notions about love and romance, and all that; and my idea is, that it's a great pity for them to enter upon life with their eyes closed to the truth. All that sort of 'love's young dream' is very pretty in books, dear, but there's not one husband in a thousand who does not enjoy a little independent holiday every year. I'm not maligning men, you know. They mean all they say at the time, but there is disappointment to be found in everything, Janet, and the less worldly wisdom you begin life with, the sharper your disappointment will be."

Mrs. Wolferston saw the hot flush deepen, and she was afraid of Janet's answer. "Well, Louisa, we cannot expect her to benefit by experience just now. She must take her chance, as others do."

"Blindfold? Well, Amy, for a prudent, religious mother you have the strangest notions. By the by, how is poor dear Mary? I was so surprised to find you had left her, though, between ourselves, you never could have got on with that precious son-in-law of yours—dear me! no."

"I came back to receive Henry Wenlock."

Mrs. Webb laughed: "There, Janet, my dear, you looked indignant at me just now for counseling worldly wisdom: your mother doesn't despise it, you see. Poor dear Mary! I am sorry for her—so young, too! She's quite alone now, of course—oh yes, she is.

As I passed the Paddington station just before luncheon, who should I see in a cab but Richard Wolferston?"

The widow gave a little surprised start, but she recovered herself at once: "Very likely. I believe Richard will often be obliged to come to town to see Mr. Painson and other business-people."

"Well, I don't know, I'm sure, about business: what with gun-cases and portmanteaus, it seemed to me that your son-in-law had luggage enough with him to travel over Europe."

Mrs. Wolferston looked pale and serious in an instant. What if her words had really awakened Mary to a sense of her neglected duties, and had created an estrangement between her and her husband? And yet this seemed impossible. "I scarcely think it could have been Richard," she said: "Mary would have written to me."

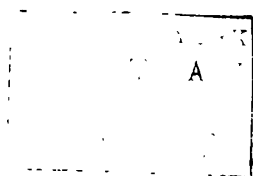
"Ah, my dear Amy, I am afraid I praised your worldly wisdom too soon: we all knew how you disliked that engagement, and of course poor dear Mary knew it too. It is not in human nature to suppose that she would let you know that you were right in your dislike; for of course, with all my disbelief in romance after marriage, I do say that a man who could leave his wife at such a time cannot be a pattern husband."

Janet quitted the room so suddenly that her mother's attention was arrested. Instead of answering her cousin, Mrs. Wolferston walked across to the window and looked out. There was no luggage, but a tall, handsome man had just sprung out of a cab, and was under the portico almost as soon as she caught a glimpse of him.

She hoped Mrs. Webb would not guess what had happened, but that good lady's sharpness never slumbered. She reached the window in time to see the cab driving off, and like lightning she arrived at the truth: "Then Captain Wenlock has come, has he, at last? Well, I am glad for poor Janet, after her long and wearisome suspense. Amy, don't you think we should go out to her?—she might faint, you know, from the suddenness of the thing."



HOME FROM INDIA.



She was hurrying to the door, but Mrs. Wolferston stopped her: "Don't go to her, Louisa. Indeed, I think she is best left alone; and perhaps when we have just said 'How d'ye do?' to Henry, you and I had better go up stairs: after such a long separation they must have so much to say to one another."

"I quite understand; but really, Amy, I must say you might have trusted my discretion. It is not probable that I, of all people, should be capable of anything likely to frustrate a match for poor Janet; for, although one can't say much for his prospects, it will be an immense matter to get another of them off your hands."

But any answer to this parting shaft was prevented by Captain Wenlock's entrance. Whatever his prospects might be, there could be no mistake as to the goodness of his expression. His deep blue eyes were handsome, but it was their hearty, genial truthfulness that fixed your gaze on them. His fair complexion, sun-browned by India, almost matched his tawny beard and moustache: he was a splendid specimen of an Englishman, and might have sat as a model for Richard the Lion-hearted.

Before Mrs. Wolferston could shake hands with him he had thrown both arms round her and given her a hearty kiss, at which impetuous proceeding Mrs. Webb's thin lips pinched themselves together, and her whole manner indicated a discreet terror lest the infliction should be extended to her.

"Ah, Mrs. Webb! You see I have not forgotten how I used to tease you and Louisa: how is Louisa?"

Seemed a rich, good-humored voice, it seemed to Mrs. Wolferston as if he had brought the first real sunshine into those small rooms of the Brompton villa.

"Louisa is quite well," her mother answered, stiffly, "but she is a young woman now, Captain Wenlock."

"Now, you don't mean by that that I am to call her Miss Webb?" He laughed heartily at her discomfited face. "Why, we are going to be cousins al-

most directly, you know, so I can't see the use of giving up good old customs."

There seemed to be no use in prolonging her visit, so Mrs. Webb reluctantly said good-bye. As she crossed the hall, escorted to the door by Captain Wenlock, she met Janet, and she mentally decided that her tall, well-grown daughter would be a far more suitable wife for him than that ordinary-looking girl.

"After all," she speculated, as she made her way back to Pimlico—"after all, they are not married yet, nor can they marry, so far as I can see, if he is to remain in England; and I don't suppose Janet would leave her mother. He has not a penny besides his pay, and Amy says that that absurd girl Janet scarcely allows herself necessary articles of dress, because she is saving all she can out of that paltry one hundred pounds a year for Christy's education. I hate such affectations of self-denial. However, dress would be thrown away on such a poor figure as Janet's."

Meanwhile, the three persons she had left at Brompton were in the fullness of that exquisite happiness which a sudden reunion with those we love, after long separation, creates.

Henry Wenlock laughed and talked and behaved far more like a schoolboy of twelve years old than a reasonable being. He called Mrs. Wolferston his darling mother already. He was going to give up the army and change into a hard-working man, he said. He should not care what he did or how hard he worked, so long as he made a comfortable home for Janet. "How long will you give me to do this in, mother?" he asked.

"I shall leave you to do it in your own time and according to your own wishes. I trust you entirely, Henry."

Her eyes filled with quick-springing tears. His manner was such a contrast to Richard Wolferston's; and yet if, instead of all this joy and warmth at their reunion, he had dropped his engagement to Janet because he was not rich enough to marry a portionless wife, she could not have censured him.

She soon found an excuse to leave him and Janet to themselves: she wanted to be alone, for her heart was overflowing with thankfulness for the return of warmth and sunshine to her home. Her great aim had been to rear her children equally, and latterly it had seemed as if all this was reversed—that all the earthly joys of life were showered on Mary, while Janet had a double burden of bitterness to bear alone. "And yet," said Mrs. Wolferston to herself, "before this confirmation of her long-tried hopes, in the time of her most wearing suspense, I believe Janet was really happier than her sister. I fear the brightness of Mary's life is a mere delusion, which keeps her from seeing the remorse she is laying up for the future."

But Mrs. Wolferston's was not a morbid, self-tormenting mind, and her thoughts soon went back to the contemplation of Janet's happiness. The meeting between Janet and her lover recalled vividly her own youth, and then came the remembrance of her early days at Rookstone, link by link, making the chain of events which had brought her to her present state. "It was too much happiness for earth," she said: "how brightly it all comes back!"

She sat leaning her head on her hand, trying to call up distinctly the last look she had seen on her husband's living face. She remembered that when he passed through the saloon after dinner, on his way to the study, he had turned and looked at her with his peculiar smile—the smile that Mary inherited, and which made her at times so like her father. Suddenly, Mrs. Wolferston started, and a keen remembrance shot through her. The study was the room her husband had last occupied, and she had never revisited it since his death. It seemed a strange omission now: she wondered at herself, as we often wonder at the non-fulfillment of purposes which, looked at deprived of all hindrances, seem more than practicable—absurdly easy: the excitement, the agitated mind, the suffering body, the manifold occupation, the overtaxed brain,—all those

things which, when present, so completely absorbed or hindered us, fade away into oblivion, and what we now call our negligence, or indolence even, stands out reproachingly. For the moment she forgot Janet's illness, the fire, her own hasty exit from Rookstone; and when some of these remembrances came back to soothe her self-reproach, she asked herself why she had not visited the study during her recent stay in her old home.

Well, she should soon be going there again: spite of their painful discussion, she felt that Mary clung to her, and when the baby should be born she knew that the tie between them would be drawn yet closer. "I do not often make resolutions," the pale, gentle woman said quietly to herself, "but if my life is spared the study shall be one of the first rooms I go into. If I find it is not occupied, I think I shall ask Richard to let me consider it my own whenever I stay at Rookstone."

The dinner-bell roused her to join the lovers. Almost before they were seated at table came an impatient ringing at the gate. It was a telegram from Rookstone. Mrs. Wolferston was wanted there *at once*.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TRESPASSING.

MARY reached the first belt of trees: then she hesitated. "Supposing I should meet old Kitty," she said, "and she were to begin some of her awful warnings and frighten me, what should I do now that I have not Richard to go to for comfort? And yet Kitty was fond of me once. I remember mamma used generally to take her something—tea or snuff—and when she was ill we used to send her jelly. I wonder if she is ill now? But I should not know how to help her if she is. I wish I had gone sometimes with mamma and Janet to see sick people: I should have learned how to speak to them, but I hate sitting in those little stuffy rooms. I never could understand the pleasure Janet seemed to find among the poor—kiss-

ing those little rough-headed children and listening to all their mothers' complaints. I would much rather follow Richard's plan—give them some money and have done with them; but I dare not offer money to Kitty, she would be affronted; and yet if I could win her over to speak well of Richard, I should be so happy. Oh, I know what I'll take her."

She clapped her hands in her wild, childish delight. The last time she saw Kitty Robbins she was crying over a dead thrush which she had kept in a cage for a long time. Mary had brought over several pet canaries from France, and she thought that one of these pretty little singing-birds would make an admirable peace-offering for cross old Kitty. It seemed strange that she should trouble herself about the old woman at all; but Kitty had nursed her through an illness, and had been very fond of her in her childhood, and Mary's was one of those clinging natures which cannot bear to be unloved by any one. Even at the risk of affecting more feeling than she really possessed, she never could resist the temptation of striving to win the love of others: it was this that made Janet consider her sister false and shallow, when in truth she was only weak and over-anxious for affection.

Kitty was the last remnant of the past left at Rookstone, and Mary clung to this remembrance: besides, deep down in Mary's heart lay a superstitious dread. Kitty had laid a sort of curse on her if she married Richard Wolferston, and it seemed to Mary that it might be well for her unborn child if she got Kitty's blessing before it came into the world, and thereby her good-will afterward.

She ran back to the saloon and took down the smallest of the birdcages: then, with unusual thoughtfulness, she opened the drawer of a cabinet in which she kept her bird-seed and rolled up a packet to take with her. As she forced the parcel into the pocket of her dress her hand struck against something hard and heavy. "It is that foolish key, and I am more foolish to cumber myself

with it, instead of putting it into some safe place till Richard comes back. He said I was to take great care of it, but he never said I was to carry it about me: it can't be lost, for I see it is labelled, 'Study door key.' It may just stay snugly on this mantel-shelf till I come in from my walk. Oh, I do hope I shall meet Kitty!"

She went down the steps again with her birdcage in her hand. The bird was so pretty in its bright golden plumage, surely Kitty must be appeased by such an offering.

She did not go direct toward the cottage: she could not do this without disobeying her husband's express injunction. She had often seen the old woman gathering sticks to mend her fire on the border of the copse that fringed the park, and she went there to look for her.

There was no Kitty, but a little way farther on, hidden among the thick bushes, she caught sight of the old woman's blue-checked apron. She opened a little white gate and passed through: there was a notice-board on either side of her, but she paid no heed to them. She only thought of her good-fortune in finding the object of her quest with so little difficulty. Yet as she drew nearer to the blue apron, half hidden by intervening tree branches, its stillness struck her as unusual.

She stooped below the drooping ash branches, so as to get a full view of the trunk where the blue apron still fluttered. Kitty was not there: one of her old aprons—which had evidently held the keeper's stores—hung on a fragment of bark.

A dreary feeling of loneliness seized on Mary. She could not remember ever to have been in this part of the park before. Just then a dry twig snapped loudly under her feet. At the noise a pheasant whizzed out of the leafy branches of a beech tree opposite her, almost touching her arm as it passed close by where she stood completely screened by the drooping ash boughs. She saw a sudden flash and felt a dull pain in the arm nearest the bird, and

then came like lightning the sharp report of a gun. Mary screamed, and then stood stunned with terror: it seemed a long while to her after when she saw a pale, awestruck face peep cautiously between the branches of the beech tree. It was Jem Robbins the keeper.

His fright and face called back Mary's senses. "Run for your mother," she said, authoritatively, "and take care of this bird."

She had not let go the cage, and Jem took it from her hand and disappeared with it among the bushes: then she found she could stand no longer. She did not faint, for the pain in her arm kept her conscious; but she was so giddy and weak that she lay down, as well as she could, on the heap of brown mast at the foot of the beech tree.

Meantime, Jem ran at his utmost speed to the lodge. He found his mother bending over the stew she had concocted for his dinner, but his sudden entrance and agitated face gave her such a fright that with a loud exclamation she upset the saucepan and its contents into the fire. "Oh, Jem! ye be the unfortunatest gowk that wur ever cradled. To think o' a beautiful pheasant and two partridges burned and spiled past mendin'!"

"They be nothin'," he gasped. "Oh, mother, I've murdered she: it be only one barrel, but she ha' got it all in she's side. Oh, mother, will I be hanged for murder?"

The great, overgrown fellow hid his face and began to roar like a bull.

"Hold yer noise this minit', will 'ee?" his mother said, fiercely. "Who be she as yee's speakin' on. Tell I, will 'ee?" she said, shaking his shoulder when she found he did not answer.

"It be Muss Mary—pretty Muss Mary—the new squire's missus."

Kitty screamed and clasped her hands in an agony of terror; then like lightning her keen wits showed her the necessity for immediate action. "Where be her?" she said, hoarsely.

"I' the copse agen the white gate. Oh, oh!" and Jem began to howl afresh.

Then she spoke more gently: "'Ee must think o' nothin' else but she now. Run down to the house and send four or five of 'em to where you left she: then get on a horse and ride as fast as you can make it gallop to the station, and bid the master send one o' they wire messages for Madam Wolferston. Bide a bit"—she was fumbling in her great pocket—"here's the place: her writ it down when her wur here. Call for Dr. Bannock as ye pass, but dwoant loiter. The wire message is, to come at all speed to 'Muss Mary.'"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE HEIR OF ROOKSTONE.

THE trembling suspense was over. Mary was the mother of a healthy little son and heir to Rookstone, and as Mrs. Wolferston bent over and kissed her the look in her daughter's eyes told her that this new little life would bind theirs for the future more closely together.

Mrs. Wolferston had reached Rookstone nearly as soon as the doctor had, but Kitty Robbins had been invaluable. She had found Mary insensible, and having satisfied herself that the wound in her arm was a mere graze, only serious on account of the shock that had accompanied it, she stood quietly beside her till more efficient help arrived, planning how best her young lady might be conveyed to the house.

Fortunately, François, the French butler, was equally ready-witted, and Mary was soon in her own bed-room, from which Kitty Robbins peremptorily expelled all assistants except one of the few English maids who had been retained in the household.

But as soon as Mary and her baby could be left for an instant, the old woman drew Mrs. Wolferston away from the bedside: "May I be forgiven, Madam 'Wolferston, but if 'ee had not ha' comed when 'ee did I wur just that frightened as I thought I wur dyin'. Her"—a jerk of her thumb toward the bed showed the subject of her words—"niver spoke a word to I: her looked at I hard like, and then her shut she's eyes

and says, 'It is Kitty's curse: oh, mother, if you were to pray for me!' I turned that cold, madam, as a stone, and shaked like as if the palsy had tooked I. To think of the poor lamb takin' my words to heart! Do 'ee think they have done she harm?"

"I trust not," said Mrs. Wolferston, gravely; "but I hope this may make you cautious for the future, Kitty, not to take up such strong dislikes, and to be more careful in what you say of others."

"Dwoant 'ee tempt I to make a promise I shall likely break, Madam Wolferston. There beant no mortal use in trying to speak up for them as 'ee dwoant think no good on. It be like papering a mildewed wall: it 'ud break out spite o' all I could do to keep it in."

"Well, you need not promise, but I think you might try, Kitty, and I hope you will."

Kitty shook her head doubtfully, and returned to her duties.

Mrs. Wolferston spent the night in her daughter's room. She felt very anxious, for Richard's absence put a double responsibility on her. She had sent off a telegram for him on her arrival, and another to announce the birth of his child, but François seemed doubtful about the possibility of his master's speedy return. Mr. Wolferston had said that he was not going direct to Lord Seton's.

Next morning the doctor pronounced his patient to be doing as well as possible, but he said she must be kept very quiet, and seemed to think Mr. Wolferston's absence was not to be regretted.

The days and nights passed uneventfully. The baby was a small, delicate creature, but pretty, nevertheless. Kitty said she wished it would not bide so still and quiet, but it was a comfort to see it alive and likely to live. On the afternoon of the third day, when the doctor had seen his patient, he asked Mrs. Wolferston to come down stairs with him into the saloon. "You must excuse me, my dear old friend," he said, kindly; "but there is no need for you to shut yourself up in Mrs. Richard's rooms. She is doing famously, and if

you don't take a little air and exercise I shall have another patient to look after. What will Mr. Wolferston say if he comes back and finds you ill?"

She smiled and said she was only a little tired, but the doctor would not go away till she had promised not to return to Mary's room till evening. "You may feel perfectly easy," he said: "I settled it all with Mrs. Robbins while you were admiring your grandson in his cradle. Good-day. If I don't find you less pale and heavy-eyed to-morrow, I shall order you back to Brompton. Mrs. Richard will do capitally now."

Perhaps there is no time when we feel so listless and at a loss what to do with ourselves as when we have been anxiously engaged in the incessant duties of a sick room. Till now, Mrs. Wolferston had scarcely left Mary's bedside. She had not quitted the rooms either night or day, and want of fresh air, as well as fatigue and anxiety, had told severely on her delicate frame. Tired as she was, she yet felt too restless to sit still. She walked from one end of the saloon to the other, looking about her eagerly. She wanted something to do, to think of. There was not even old Kitty to sympathize with. The clock on the mantelpiece had stopped. It was a curious, old-fashioned time-piece of the date of Louis Treize, and Richard Wolferston never allowed any one to wind it but himself. Strangely enough, the hands pointed to the exact time of baby's birth.

"How very remarkable!" thought Mrs. Wolferston. She bent down to examine the clock more closely. It was quaint and unique-looking, but certainly not an ornament to the handsome alabaster shelf—almost covered with figures and grotesque carvings collected in their travels, still lying in a sort of artistic disorder. Among these lay a key. She scarcely knew why—it was so contrary to her usual habit to examine that which belonged to others—but Mrs. Wolferston had taken up the key and read the label attached to it before she remembered what she was doing—"Study door key."

Her resolution flashed back on her remembrance. Up stairs, Mary and the baby had completely absorbed every thought. She had not once recollected her promised visit to her husband's room. All her listlessness and fatigue had gone now in an instant. She fitted the key into the lock of the door that divided the two rooms, and turned the handle. Then, unwilling that other eyes should pry into this retreat, now so dear and sacred to her, she went back to the double doors of the saloon and closed them.

The afternoon passed away in the quick fading of September daylight, the golden light of sunset quivered over the beech trees with the gleam of a pheasant's wing: here and there a leaf, sooner tired of life than his fellows, had withered to a rich red-brown, and in the intense warmth of that good-night of the day-king glowed a burning scarlet, making all else pale and tame by comparison.

But the man coming rapidly across the open sward between the terrace and the first belt of trees had no eye to note the burning leaves or the rose-colored clouds reflected in the lake, where the trees breaking away revealed the full glories of the sunset. A great moth whirled into his face, almost blinding him, but he did not even raise his hand to dash it from him.

Richard Wolferston was insensible to all outward things. He had received the telegrams together at four o'clock that morning, a change in Lord Seton's plans having taken him far away from the place to which they had been addressed, and he had not stayed to eat or drink, but had hastened southward with all the speed he could. When he reached the station his impatience had not let him wait while a horse or vehicle was being found for him: he had hurried breathlessly away, and striking across the fields, had reached the park gates by Kitty's lodge with wonderful rapidity.

Meantime, up stairs in the sick room Mary was growing weary of her mother's absence: she felt so much better

and stronger she was sure she might have talked to her this evening.

She asked Kitty to go and find Mrs. Wolferston, but the old woman refused to do this, although she wondered at "the madam's" absence. So Mary lay counting the roses in the border of the paper and wondering at her mother's neglect.

There was a sound of footsteps in the dressing-room at last, and Kitty hurried in. But instead of Mrs. Wolferston, there stood the new squire, pale as death through his bronzed complexion—for all the world, as Kitty told her son afterward, like a white nigger.

"Kitty," he said—he had never called the old woman by her name before, but now it seemed to come naturally—"will you tell Mrs. Wolferston I am here? She must not be startled, you know."

"Teachin' I!" growled Kitty to herself; "but it be like all new-comers: they all tries they's own ways at first goin' off, but they be glad enough to take advice afore they be done.—'Ee'd best find the madam herself," she said: "maybe her can let Muss Mary know as 'ee be here."

"What do you mean by 'madam'?" he said, roughly: "go and tell my wife as gently as you can that I am here, and ask her if I may see her."

"I'll do yer biddin'," the old woman said, sulkily; "but t' old madam 'ud ha' done it better and more quiet-like. Dwoant 'ee go for to cast blame on I if her be a bit frightened wi' 't."

He only pointed impatiently to the door of communication between the two rooms, and Kitty felt herself obliged to obey him.

Richard Wolferston had traveled so rapidly that he had scarcely realized all that had been happening at Rookstone, and as he looked round the dressing-room, metamorphosed for the time being into a nursery, a dreary feeling of change and discomfort crept over him. Instead of his darling's bright welcome, he should find her a weak, helpless invalid, likely to continue ill, perhaps, for several days longer. A little bleating sound caught his ear, and he became aware

that what he had looked at as a basket mounted on two chairs was the cradle of the heir of Rookstone. There had been too much of suddenness and anxiety at its unexpected arrival to think about the rich lace and pink silk hangings which had been ordered for its bed.

To most men, the sight of their first-born would have left no room for smaller feelings, but Richard's fastidious eyes saw nothing but a little crimson face between the folds of a blanket, and he drew back in disgust.

"Well, to be sure!" he exclaimed: "can that be Mary's child? And I suppose all my comfort will be sacrificed to this hideous little plaything."

It may seem absurd, but it is a truth notwithstanding, that he obeyed Kitty's summons and entered his wife's room with a strong feeling of jealousy already raised against the unconscious baby who in his eyes had worked so disastrous a transformation in his house.

CHAPTER XXV.

LOST.

MARY'S loving reception dispelled some of his gloom, but although he tried to seem contented and cheerful as long as her eyes were on him, his conversation with her had given him fresh causes for discontent. His mother-in-law at Rookstone, and Kitty Robbins, of all people in the world, installed, for the time being, as the manager of his child! "Not a very finished kind of nurse for the heir of Rookstone," he said to himself as he went down stairs in search of Mrs. Wolferston.

"Heir of Rookstone!" The words had a pleasant sound, a sure, genuine ring: it almost seemed to Richard then, as he came slowly down the great, dimly-lighted staircase—for the tall old stained-glass window was too full of armorial bearings to admit much sunshine—that the ground felt firmer beneath his feet.

The rightful branch of the family was grafted in again on the parent stock, the stain was removed from his father's name, and it was his doing, for if he

had not gained the good-will of his cousin Christopher, matters might have turned out differently.

As he reached the hall he met the doctor. The little man congratulated him, but not with the heartiness he had shown toward his old friend's widow. Something in the new master of Rookstone kept most men at arm's length whom he did not strive specially to fascinate.

"We have had it all our own way, you see, squire." He rubbed his hands with rather a mischievous look. "I expect if you had been at home you would have sent for some London big-wig or other, and a fine, stuck-up lady nurse, who would have wanted half a dozen servants to wait on her."

But Richard Wolferston had no fault to find: he shook hands cordially with Mr. Bannock. "As long as that ugly old woman does not cast an evil eye over the child," he said, laughing, "I suppose she is as good a nurse as my wife could have about her."

"Yes, yes," said the doctor: "she does well enough, because she does what one tells her; but as long as Mrs. Richard has her mother's she is all right, squire. She has not left her for a moment till I insisted on it, and I just called in again now, as I came back from my afternoon round, to tell her not to sit up to-night: it's a perfect nonsensical throwing away of vital power," said the lively doctor, pulling up his shirt collar. "Perhaps you can tell me where I shall find Mrs. Wolferston, senior: the servants don't seem to have seen her since I left, some hours ago."

Richard rang and inquired. No, Mrs. Wolferston had not been seen or heard of since she went into the saloon with the doctor. Mary had complained to her husband of her mother's absence, so there was no use in looking for her up stairs: the French maid had already been up twice to seek Mrs. Wolferston in her own rooms.

"Don't you think she may be in the park?" said Richard.

The doctor thought this probable, but he had not time to continue the search

and Richard promised to deliver the message he left for his mother-in-law.

A pew tie had sprung up between them, and as he walked slowly toward the lake it seemed to Richard that his feelings were less bitter toward his cousin's widow. He had always heard that grandmothers became completely foolish in their devotion to their daughters' children. It might be well if this were realized in the case of Mary's mother: she would have no thoughts to spare for interference in the household; and if she were allowed undisputed sway in the nursery, he should have Mary all to himself again, for surely she would be willing to give the child up to her mother's care. What could she herself know about its management? He even thought it might be well next spring, when he took his wife to London, to ask Mrs. Wolferston to watch over her grandchild during their absence, for he determined that nothing should ever induce him to move about encumbered with nurses and children.

"People call them blessings," he said: "they might be if they came ready grown, but it seems to me for the next ten years or so there will be a perpetual hue and cry after the health of this precious morsel of humanity."

He grumbled thus to himself, but his pride of fatherhood grew stronger every moment, and already he was looking forward to the time when this son should be a candidate for honors which his own father's disgrace had debarred him from striving after. "We have been commoners long enough," he said: "why should not my son win himself the right to bear a title? Blood is all very well, but in these days, like most old-fashioned things, it is out of date, and must have the advertisement which popularity or a well-sounding title will give, to show people what it is worth."

He had become so wrapped in these speculations that he had almost forgotten the subject of his quest. By the time he had gone round to the point where a small rustic bridge spanned the lake, he had convinced himself that Mrs. Wolferston was not likely to re-

main so late in the park. The light had become dim. It was more probable that she had returned to the house by a different path from that which he had taken when he began his search.

As he reached the foot of the terrace steps he met one of the under-gardeners, a cousin of Jem Robbins, who had been born and reared on the estate. "Have you seen Mrs. Wolferston?" He spoke in the cold, haughty voice in which he addressed all the old dependants at Rookstone. They treated him with outward respect, but he had a vague consciousness that they regarded him as an usurper, and would gladly have seen little Christy in his place.

"Yes, squoire, I ha' seen she."

"Where?—in the park?"

"In there," he pointed to the saloon: "she wur there when I came to work afore: I saw she through the window."

Richard felt irritated. No one could tell him anything but this—Mrs. Wolferston had been last seen in the saloon. "Were you here at work all the afternoon?"

"Yes, squoire, and I'd finished, as I thowt, but Muster Sprague, when him heerd as 'ee wur a-comed back, puts I on again to sweep the gravel off the steps."

"Well, you can go now," said his master. "Then all the time you were at work here you did not see Mrs. Wolferston come down the steps, or out on the terrace even?"

"Hur have never comed out: I believe she be in yonder still."

This time Richard looked at him more attentively. He pointed in at the saloon window as before, but toward the little door of the study. The squire turned deadly white. It was not light enough for the gardener to notice his paleness, but he did remark a strange change in the tone of his master's voice. "In where? can't you speak plain, man?" he said, hoarsely. "Here, come in and show me where it is you mean."

He held open the glass door which led off the terrace into the saloon, and the man followed him. The squire's manner had "put him out," he told his

cousin Jem afterward, and he was determined to avoid further bullying. He walked straight up to the study door and touched the handle. "I see her go in there," he said.

The key was in the lock, but Richard Wolferston stood looking at it as if he had been smitten with paralysis.

The rough countryman, considering his errand fulfilled, pulled his hair and left him. But Richard did not know that he was left alone: he only saw the labeled key hanging in the door of his cousin's study.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MONSIEUR FRANÇOIS LEROUX.

MRS. WOLFERSTON'S maid Thompson had been spending the afternoon with her old acquaintances in the village, and she and Mrs. Slocombe, the mistress of the one shop of Rookstone, had waxed so very chatty over their tea that time had passed by unheeded. However, there was no evening dressing to go home for, and her lady had desired her not to hurry, so Mrs. Thompson did not feel very guilty, although it had grown quite dark by the time she reached the park gates. She saw some one coming up the avenue, and she soon made out that it was Monsieur François Leroux, the French butler.

Monsieur Leroux had seen a good deal of life in various ways. He had been a soldier, an actor, a hairdresser, and finally had attained the rank of major-domo to the squire of Rookstone. He said that in all his adventures he had always fallen on his legs, and this good-fortune he owed probably as much to his imperturbable good temper and ready courtesy as to the singular ingenuity on which he prided himself.

"Ah, Madame Thompson," he exclaimed, "we have been so dull without you! The house has been of a sadness to make me die. It is too— What you call this word I know not, or at the least I cannot utter it in your English, so I must tell to you, madame, in French, that you are *barbare* to desert us for so many hours. You and your charming

mistress, you come to Rookstone—well, we are so 'appy, we joy in your presence, and then—pouf!—you go back to your London, and we are left *tristes à mourir*."

Mrs. Thompson bridled. She was a plump, blue-eyed, comely damsel of thirty-five—a spinster calling herself Mrs. for the sake of dignity, for dignity was her weak point. She admired Monsieur Leroux's handsome black eyes and whiskers, but she treated him with the cold reserve she considered women should maintain toward men. She thought that Miss Mary had allowed herself to be won far too easily. Mr. Richard ought to have been kept in suspense much longer; and as Mrs. Thompson considered Monsieur Leroux as part and parcel of his master, she was resolved he should not imagine she was to be duped by "fine frilagree rubbish."

She told him that on their former visit her mistress had been obliged to return to town on business, and that their present stay was not likely to be a long one.

"Ah, madame, why will you poison the present by revealing the future? I come to you sore and wounded for consolation, and you, on the contrary, increase my vexations."

Mrs. Thompson laughed. She knew very well that in his master's absence Monsieur François reigned supreme. No one dreamed of disputing his authority, and the news of the squire's return had not reached the village. "Oh, Monsieur François!" she said.

"Madame, it is true." He put his hand on his heart. "That old woman have vexed me: she is, I think, one of the furies, or perhaps a vitch."

"A what?" said Mrs. Thompson: "you know, monsieur, I asked you not to use foreign words in speaking to me."

"But, madame, I speak English: it is your Shakespeare who tell to me the name of vitch—they are three. Oh it makes me turn cold to think of them—lean, and old, and horrible. Well, then, I call this old woman, for she is no other, a vitch. Just now the squire, my master, he have return while you take walk. He say to me, 'Go to tha

old woman and tell to her, Where is Madame Wolferston?' Well, I go up stairs, and I tap so sweetly at the door. It open, and I see the vitch. I ask for Madame Wolferston, and the face of the old woman become red with fury. 'What you mean?' she say, and she come in the gallery and shut the door behind her. 'This is the third time my lady is disturb. Your master must be a fool: Madame Wolferston has not been here once since the doctor left.'"

"Do you mean to say that my mistress has not been in Mrs. Richard's room all the afternoon?" Mrs. Thompson had found a sudden interest in the Frenchman's story.

"No, madame; and that which there is of most extraordinary is, that your madame has not been seen anywhere. She has, in fact, vanish away, just as the spirits fade in your Shakespeare, which telled me the name of vitch. Madame Wolferston is lost, but when I tell so to the old Madame Kittee, what think you she do? She take my shoulder and she say, 'Get away with you, and tell to your master he ought to be 'shamed: if the madame cannot be found he have made away with her.' Truly it is true, Madame Thompson. I feel so déconcerted that I try to soften the anger of the vitch. I think if I speak to her with much respect she will recover her reason, for she have the look of an insensate. So I say, 'Madame,' and then my tiresome memory cheat me, and I cannot remember the name of the vitch, but her eyes make me hurry, and by good luck (at the least it seems to me good luck) I remind myself that she have the name of a small and rather impertinent bird. So I tell her, smiling, you know, and bowing like so"—he put on his most fascinating manner—"Madame Kittee Sparrow, I assure you—" Well, Madame Thompson, I am ashamed to tell to you the conduct of your vitch: she leave go of my shoulder and she box me."

"Law, Monsieur François!"

"It is true: even at this instant, madame, but for the obscurity, you would see my ear is always scarlet from her

box. Aha, madame! it is too much to suffer from the hand of a hideous fury. It is, perhaps, for her 'appy that she have at once made retreat into my lady's bed-chamber. If you have regard for her, madame—your vitch—you will counsel her not again to offer herself to the sight of François Leroux."

Monsieur François drew himself up with military rigidity: his outraged feelings had reasserted themselves as he related Kitty's insult: he was in no mood for compliments now.

By this time they had reached the side entrance of the house, and Thompson asked one of the housemaids, who was crossing the passage which led from it, if she knew where her mistress was.

"No, and no one else knows: we've all been looking for her ever since the squire came back."

"Where is the squire?" said Thompson, more frightened than she cared to show.

The girl shook her head and passed on, but Leroux had heard the question and answered it: "If the squire is in the house at all, he is sure to be in the saloon."

Thompson was too much agitated to remember proprieties, and she hurried through the passages till she reached the entrance hall, and then almost ran into the saloon, dressed for walking as she was.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FOUND.

THE light was so dim within the study that at first Richard Wolferston could not make out anything distinctly, but after a little, one familiar object, then another, became more and more visible, and he saw that the room had no occupant—empty, and seemingly undisturbed since he had locked the outer door and taken away the key. His cousin's high-backed wooden chair looked as if it had been pushed away from the davenport by some one who had occupied it, but he could not be positive that he had not himself pushed it on his last visit. And yet it was folly to tell him—

self all this. How came the key in the door? and who except his cousin's widow would have felt any interest in visiting this close, musty room? If he had followed the impulse of his strong loathing for the study and all that it contained, he would at once have retreated and locked the door; but he resolved to make himself quite sure that the room was in the state in which he had left it. In that uncertain light he could not be sure of anything. He knew there were candles on the chimney-piece, but he might knock something over groping in the dark, and he went back through the saloon and lit a taper from the gas-lamp in the hall.

Once more within the study, he held the light up and took a minute survey of all the room contained: nothing seemed disturbed. Standing in front of the fireplace, he faced the larger part of the room. He turned the light toward it sudden, and he started.

On the desk, shown plainly now that the light fell on it, lay the key of the drawers—the key which he remembered to have taken out of his pocket and played in the desk just before he left home.

He made a hasty forward movement, and his foot became entangled in something on the floor. The shudder that came with the touch told Richard Wolferston that he had at last found what he expected to find in his cousin's study, though not in such a situation. He held the light down an instant to see how she was lying, and then he raised his mother-in-law's insensible body and carried it into the saloon. He laid her on the nearest ottoman and went hastily back into the study.

It had been all so instantaneous that in raising and removing her he had been guided more by mechanical impulse than by any process of thought. But when he took up the small key and tried the drawers, one by one his senses came back to him. "Is she dead or living?" he asked himself. Even then he was careful to close and lock the study door behind him before he went back to look at her.

Mrs. Wolferston was white as death: her face had all the rigidity of a person lately departed, her hands were cold and lifeless. He was still bending over her, trying to feel her heart-beats, when Thompson burst into the room. Usually she was calm in moments of emergency, but the sight of her beloved mistress lying, as she thought, dead, made her frantic. "She has been murdered!" she exclaimed. "Who has done this, Mr. Wolferston? Oh, my poor dear, ill-used lady!" She fell on her knees in a paroxysm of tears and sobs.

"Don't be a fool!"—Richard spoke fiercely—"your mistress has fainted: if you can't control yourself, send Eulalie and François—they will know what to do."

He could not have taken a better means to restore Mrs. Thompson's senses: the idea of turning her darling mistress over to the tender mercies of that frippery Eulalie, who dressed to look no better than she should be, was at once a quietus and a stimulant. She saw that this was no time for argument, and running away, she quickly came back with the necessary remedies.

As soon as a faint movement quivered in the closed eyelids, the maid turned to Richard Wolferston, who had been anxiously watching her and in readiness to aid her efforts. "I mean no offence, sir," she said, gravely, "but I think Monsieur Leroux will help me to carry my mistress better than you can. Would you mind ringing for him, if you please, sir?"

Monsieur Leroux came. He raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders, but, a true man of the world, he made no comment on madame's helpless state. He not only carried the poor lady up stairs, but proceeded to turn down the bed and settle the pillows and toilet arrangements—much more like a woman than a man, as Thompson afterward related—and then he asked tenderly if he could be of any use or send any one to help his dear Madame Thompson.

Her answer surprised and discomfited him: "If Mr. Wolferston will be

good enough to stay with Mrs. Richard for a few minutes, I should like to see Kitty Robbins."

Leroux threw up both hands and his shoulders nearly touched his ears, but he obeyed, muttering to himself as he went down the gallery, "These English are truly an impossible people. If even a vitch is of their nation, they give her preference to a Frenchman well born, well made and well bred: they are of a prejudice and an ignorance that one cannot imagine to one's self."

His self-satisfaction was soothed next morning when he found Thompson waiting to speak to him as he came across the hall. Mrs. Wolferston was still very ill, and she wished Monsieur Leroux to step over at once to Mr. Bannock's and ask him to come and see her mistress. "But," she added, in a whisper, "you need say nothing about the fainting fit: my lady seems anxious not to have it spoken of in any way."

Thompson's own belief was that Richard Wolferston had quarreled with her mistress, and frightened her into the state in which she found her. She did not dare to say this, but she had made up her mind, if the doctor would only second her, that they should not spend an hour longer than was absolutely necessary at Rookstone; and in pursuance of this idea, by the time Mr. Bannock arrived she had packed everything and was ready to start at a moment's notice.

Mr. Bannock was greatly shocked at the change a few hours had made in his old friend. There was a wild, startled look about her, and her face was still deathly pale. He asked several very searching questions, but he did not elicit the truth, and he believed that Mrs. Wolferston was suffering from over-fatigue and anxiety. "If you are so weak as this," he said, gravely, "you ought to get a change at once. Now, Mrs. Richard has her husband to cheer her up a bit, she will not miss you so much: you can come back again, you know, when you feel up to it."

Mrs. Wolferston was strangely altered, he thought. At first she insisted on remaining with her daughter, and grew

eager and excited at his opposition; but when he said he should call her son-in-law to combat her arguments, she yielded at once and said she was ready to go.

On one point the doctor remained firm and deaf to all her entreaties. There must be no leavetaking: he would not answer for the consequences of such a trial to Mrs. Richard. He would take all on himself. He should tell his young patient that, as her husband had chosen to return before he was wanted, he had sent her mother home to prevent her from seeing too much company in her sick room at once.

Mrs. Wolferston did not speak or smile, but sat with the same fixed, scared look on her face that had so startled him on his first arrival. "Can I go at once?" she said suddenly. "If Mary hears I am gone, she will take my absence more quietly. She will fret to see me if she knows I am in the house."

The doctor felt her pulse again. "Yes," he said, cheerfully, though in his heart he felt terribly anxious: "I believe you ought to be with Miss Janet. If you start now you will get the early train."

Mrs. Wolferston lay back exhausted. "You could do me a great service," she said presently. "I believe you are right about leavetaking. If I could leave Rookstone without seeing any one at all—if you could manage this for me—I am sure it would be better."

A sudden look of inquiry came into the doctor's face. Had Mrs. Wolferston and her son-in-law quarreled? But this was no time for questioning, and he merely answered that nothing could be easier: the squire never appeared before eleven o'clock, and she would be on her way to town long before then.

So, with only the doctor and François to see her off, Mrs. Wolferston again bade farewell to Rookstone. She looked sad and pale, and her eyes wandered restlessly over the park, as if she was bidding good-bye to all her favorite haunts and remembrances. "Shall I ever come back again?" she said to herself, and something seemed to shut this hope from her future.



PART V.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MRS. WOLFERSTON'S SECRET.

MRS. WOLFERSTON lay dying. The doctors had told Janet that they could not say with certainty how long life might linger, but that its duration now could only be a question of days or hours; and it was so fearful to witness her mother's gasping, spasmodic breathing that even Janet felt compelled to give up hope.

Both the doctors persisted that some sudden shock had accelerated the progress of the disease, which perhaps might have spared her some years of life. Janet questioned Thompson, but the maid had given so solemn a promise not to reveal what had happened on the eve of her departure from Rookstone that she evaded her young mistress's questions, although she saw that her suspicions were roused. Yes, the old doubts which had only been smothered, never uprooted, had got possession of Janet now, and would be listened to. So far as she could make out, her mother had shown no signs of illness till the squire's return. When Mrs. Wolferston reached Brompton she had been far too ill for questioning, and in the intervals which succeeded these fearful attacks of spasmodic breathing she was exhausted almost to insensibility.

Henry Wenlock had gone down into the country to see some rich relations who promised to help him in finding some appointment as a means of livelihood, and Janet had no one to speak to—no one to divert her thoughts from her suffering mother.

Day after day passed, and still she lingered. Her mind apparently did not wander, and yet Janet fancied that when she took little Christy in to kiss her be-

fore he went to school, her mother's eyes had a wild, unnatural expression as they fixed steadfastly on the child.

One evening she was sitting by the bedside half asleep. Her mother had passed a terrible night of suffering, and had lain nearly all day without seeming to notice what went on around her.

"Janet," said the faint voice, and Janet started into waking life. "Come very close and listen. Give me some of those drops the doctor brought yesterday."

Janet was surprised: she had thought her mother unconscious when the doctor on the previous day put into her hands a strong restorative, telling her to give it when the patient should seem able to take it. She gave it now, and she saw her mother's eyes brighten: her voice, too, was louder and steadier.

"Janet darling, listen: I want you to promise me two things before I leave you."

"Oh, mother, mother!" and the poor girl's tears burst forth, though she tried hard to keep them back.

Her mother went on as if she had not spoken: "Promise me to watch over Mary as if she were your child instead of your sister, and promise me, too, to keep my secret from every one but Mr. Painson."

"From Henry?" Janet looked imploringly, but her mother's face did not alter.

"It seems hard, my good, obedient child, to ask this, but I must: you might tell every one if you told Henry."

The trembling voice grew weaker, and Janet again put the restorative to her mother's lips, and she went on speaking: "On the last day I spent at Rookstone I saw the key of your father's

study in the saloon, and I unlocked the door and went in. Evidently the room had never been used since he left it: its desolate look made me very sad. I sat down in his chair in front of the davenport, thinking. I sat there nearly an hour: I believe I had just risen and was going out of the room, and then I remembered that he used to keep in one of the davenport drawers a sketch of Mary as an infant. He drew it in crayons for me himself, and I thought I would try and find it."

Her voice sank again, and her eyes closed wearily.

"You are exhausting yourself, darling: finish telling me another time," said Janet, anxiously.

"No, no," but her voice was a whisper now, interrupted by hard-drawn gasps of breathing. Janet bent her ear to listen: "I was nearly sure it was in the lowest drawer, and yet—I cannot tell why—it seemed as if I must begin at the top and go downward. I found the key just within the desk: the first drawer was quite empty, the second looked empty too. I was just closing it, but I heard the rustling of paper, and I found I could not shut the drawer close. I put my hand in: a roll of paper had got fixed at the back so as to prevent the drawer from shutting. I drew it out. Outside the roll was a strange handwriting: I don't remember the words, but I saw that it was your father's will. I put it back in the drawer: I only thought that it was a copy of the other."

The voice had become so broken, so faint, that Janet could scarcely gather the sense of the words. She felt desperate: raising her mother's head, she put the restorative to her lips again, and the suffocating gasps grew stiller.

"I put it back in the drawer, and then I pulled it out again and opened it. I do not know why I did this—I could not help it. It was another will, Janet—the reverse of that we have believed in."

"Was it signed?" said Janet, eagerly.

"I cannot remember: I do not think I looked. I put it back in the drawer

and locked it, and then I do not know what happened till I was carried up stairs."

Janet's lips burned with questions, but her mother had no longer strength to speak. A fearful spasmodic attack succeeded the unusual exertion, and during several hours Janet feared that life would pass away. Toward morning Mrs. Wolferston grew quieter, and desired that a clergyman might be sent for. He stayed with her for some time, but when he took leave of Janet he told her he feared her mother was dying rapidly.

"She is quite aware of her state," he said, "but I think you ought to know it."

CHAPTER XXIX.

MANŒUVRING.

MRS. WEBB was in her own opinion a devoted mother, but she had married a man several years younger than herself, and naturally wished to look juvenile as long as she could. In Louisa's infancy her mother had consigned her to the charge of an experienced nurse, contenting herself with a peep at "the sweet darling" once or twice a day. It had been hard, of course, thus to deny herself; but then, as Mrs. Webb said, the duties of society must not be neglected. What would become of her husband's position in the world, to say nothing of dear Louisa's future prospects, if she did not maintain and continually replenish her circle of acquaintance? Dress, too, Mrs. Webb argued, unless it is to be a matter of lavish expenditure, must be a matter of time and thought and contrivance. Mrs. Webb did not dress well—she possessed neither the elegance of simplicity nor good taste—but she was always smart and showy, and made herself conspicuous: probably this was all she aimed at.

It had been pleasant so long as Louisa wore white frocks and sashes to listen to the admiring comments her beauty excited. Mrs. Webb had been nice-looking, and Louisa inherited the same doll-like type—a white skin and dark eyes and hair; but instead of her moth-

er's restless, intriguing expression, she had her father's calm, self-satisfied tranquillity.

John Webb thought that it was impossible a Webb could err. He had greatly admired his wife before he married her: if he had been a little behind the scenes, he might have been astounded at the skill with which the *passée* flirt had succeeded in entangling him into an engagement; but now that she was his wife and bore his name he regarded her as a piece of perfection, only second in degree to himself. He was short and stout, a good-looking, commonplace man, but in his own eyes the model of that which a man should be.

Louisa had just returned from a finishing school in Paris, and her mother began to realize that a daughter, however charming, is expensive.

Louisa's requirements had already nearly doubled her dressmaker's bill, and when his wife pleaded this to Mr. Webb, he told her that money was tighter than ever—that in fact he believed he ought rather to diminish her allowance than increase it.

"Can't you talk to Louy and teach her how to economize?"

His wife had waited patiently for this answer. Mr. Webb thought slowly, and delivered his words as if they were oracles. She sneered: "It would be of as much use to expect reason from Louy as practical advice from you: she is as headstrong as she is extravagant."

"Then, my dear"—the oracle walked up to the glass and satisfied himself as to the arrangement of his moustache—"I can only say I am sorry to hear it: Miss Webb must not be headstrong if she is to maintain her proper position in the world." He took up his book and went on reading.

One of the most remarkable traits in Mrs. Webb was that she never quarrelled with any one: she had no depth of feeling; therefore her sensitiveness rarely suffered. She had a very exalted idea of her own powers of management, and she certainly understood the art of governing her husband. She arranged his

home so that it should suit all the requirements of his fastidious taste; she maintained his reputation in the world; she screwed and pinched in every possible manner to save out-of-sight household expenses, and she rarely contradicted her husband in public. As to inducing him to be less puffed up by his own merits and be more charitable in his judgment of others—as to helping him in any way to live for anything but himself—Mrs. Webb could not have done this, because she was so wrapped in self-love that she attributed all the little vexations and trials of life to the malice and folly of others.

She had that morning heard of the death of her cousin, Mrs. Wolferston; and now, as she sat pondering on the best means of meeting Louisa's expenses, a bright idea came to relieve her perplexity.

But she was in no hurry to communicate it to her husband. She prided herself on her judgment, and she liked to be sure there was no flaw in her projects before she put them forth.

Janet and Christy must have a home: why should they not live with them? They ought to pay, for such comforts as Mrs. Webb was prepared to give them, one hundred pounds a year each. And besides this, Mrs. Webb entertained another scheme. She had always liked and admired Henry Wenlock: he was not rich, but he was thoroughly well-born and had good expectations. Who could say what he might not do in the new line of life he had chosen? for Mr. Webb had astonished his wife only a few days before by telling her that Captain Wenlock had sold his commission and had got a post in a banking-house.

She wished Louisa to marry young Wenlock, but this would be difficult. Mr. Webb disliked seeing young men at his house. If Janet came to reside with them, as a matter of course Henry Wenlock would be a frequent visitor, and it was impossible that he could continue to prefer that girl Janet to her lovely Louisa.

Do not consider Mrs. Webb crafty and cruel: remember, she had not mar-

ried for love herself, and she was quite incapable of estimating the agony such a desertion would inflict on Janet. Besides, she promised herself that when Henry was safely married to Louisa she would find a more suitable husband for her young cousin.

Mrs. Webb mentioned the first part of her scheme to her husband in the evening, having looked at it from every point of view, and to her surprise he acquiesced in it cordially. He had been speculating unknown to his wife, and just then he was almost beside himself with anxiety, trying vainly to raise money to avert an exposure. Two hundred a year would be a boon, indeed, no matter how it was earned. Mrs. Webb lost no time in proposing the plan to Janet.

It seemed very hard to the poor girl to be disturbed in the midst of her deep sorrow to discuss business arrangements. At first she asserted positively that she and Christy could continue to live alone at Brompton, but she was obliged to admit after a while that this would be very difficult unless she took a chaperon. She would have preferred a residence with good-natured Aunt Dawson, but Mrs. Webb had so managed matters that Mrs. Dawson thought Janet would not like such a plan, and therefore did not propose it: besides, she lived so very far away from Christy's school that it would scarcely have been desirable to place him under her roof.

The news of her mother's death had been a severe shock to Mary, and on the day of the funeral she was so ill that Richard would not leave her. To Janet it was a reprieve not to see him: till now she had scarcely had leisure to reflect on her mother's story, she had been called on to decide on so much of pressing importance.

She had stipulated only to join the Webbs at meal-times and when she liked in the evenings, so that she had the luxury of solitude—a luxury indeed when associates are thoroughly wanting in sympathy.

It seemed to her, as she sat alone now, some weeks after her mother's death,

that the words, "It was another will—not the one we have believed in," again sounded in her ears. She did not give a thought to Mary's sorrow at the discovery of her husband's guilt, for Janet never doubted that he was guilty: she only felt a fierce satisfaction in the task that seemed laid on her to reinstate her little brother in his inheritance.

Her mind became gradually filled with the contemplation of herself as the devoted champion who should baffle injustice and bring guilt to shame: she forgot her mother's injunction to watch over Mary as if she were her child instead of her sister.

In this mood she was glad of the prohibition about Henry Wenlock. She preferred achieving her victory unaided: then with what joy and triumph would she announce it to him!

She must consult Mr. Painson: her mother had desired her to do this. She did not want his opinion—her mind was made up on the subject of Richard's guilt—but the old lawyer might be useful in suggesting means and plans: at present she could not see how she was to act. The pupils of her eyes dilated till the eyes themselves looked black, and a bright color glowed on her delicate skin. "Yes, my darling father," she said, "the stain of injustice shall be removed from your memory, and Christy shall lead the life he was born to lead."

CHAPTER XXX.

LOUISA WEBB.

LOUISA WEBB had rejoiced at first when she heard that she was to have Janet for a constant companion, but when she found that her cousin's residence with them would prevent her mother from spending part of the winter at Brighton, she changed her mind: "Such nonsense! If Christy's school has begun, what does it matter? As if they could not have stayed in Vincent Square by themselves while we went away! And then mamma says our Christmas must be very quiet because of Janet's deep mourning: it is very

hard on me, when I'm only just home from school."

When she found that Janet's residence entailed the frequent presence of Henry Wenlock she grew more reconciled.

Louisa had a thorough belief in herself and her own powers of fascination—a belief which gives a woman far more power in society than the mere timid, unconscious possession of real beauty or worth. From the first evening she saw them together she decided that Wenlock was entirely thrown away on her cousin Janet; and although she was not blind to his evident affection for his promised wife, she persuaded herself this simply arose from the fact of his long absence from England, and from his having lived in stations where there was little female society. "He knows no better," she said.

Louisa did not share her mother's manœuvring notions. She was far too charming to think of marriage for two or three years to come, but Captain Wenlock was not blind, and if he admired her—well, really, no one could blame her.

There is a kind of woman who sets down the result of all the arts she practices to the natural attractions she possesses. Never once does she acknowledge to herself that she has made any steps toward seeking the admiration she exults in. It is her fate: she is charming, she says sometimes, with a little tender sigh—too charming for the happiness of others.

It was not at all displeasing to Louisa, when next Captain Wenlock came to dinner, to notice Janet's brusque answers and reserved, absent manner.

She watched the lovers closely during dinner: she saw that, although Henry still persisted in addressing his conversation chiefly to Janet, his manner grew more restrained and his face clouded. As they went up stairs she spoke to Janet: "I say, dear, how you do tease Henry! You'll have to go down on your knees and make a humble apology when he comes up stairs, I can tell you: he looked as cross as two sticks just

now. I shall stay here to see how prettily you will do it."

"Then I am afraid you will be disappointed; and really, Louy, you take strange fancies in your head: you are quite mistaken if you think Henry and I have quarreled."

Louisa laughed after her mother's teasing fashion. She loved teasing dearly, and she thought it would be great fun to see a lover's quarrel between Captain Wenlock and her dignified little cousin, for Janet's distaste for Louisa's confidences and missy notions had created a certain amount of pique in Miss Webb.

When Henry Wenlock came up stairs he moved at once into the back drawing-room, where Janet was sitting: she knew that Louisa's satirical eyes were upon her, and although she longed to know if Henry were displeased with her, she would not even look up at his approach. "I have done nothing to make him really angry," she thought. "Louisa will soon be tired of watching us, but she shall get no food for her curiosity if I can help it."

Captain Wenlock lingered a few moments: then he seemed to become aware that Janet was trying to look away from him, and he went into the other room. She could not see his face: the pain and surprise there must have touched her through all the pride she had roused to keep herself from following him across the room.

Louisa smiled. She sat down and sang a song which Henry Wenlock had specially admired on his last visit. At first he took no notice: he stood at a table turning over some of the very uninteresting books which Mrs. Webb considered drawing-room literature. He hoped Janet would follow him: he could not understand what ailed her. At dinner-time she had treated him as courteously as she might have treated a stranger, and now she was trying to avoid him. He detested caprice: hitherto he had seen no trace of this in Janet. He began to remember how very young she was at the time of their first engagement. They had been sep-

arated nearly two years: how could he be sure that she had not changed in the interval? He had seen her very seldom since his return—almost always in the presence of others.

He loved music, and sometimes it had troubled him a little that Janet could not sing.

"Come and sing this duet with me," said Louisa, in her coaxing, arch way. "I am going to make a brother of you, do you know? I have always so longed for a brother who could sing duets with me! Come!" Without waiting for an answer, she began the accompaniment, and Wenlock found himself singing to his heart's content almost before he had decided what to do.

'One song succeeded another rapidly, and when at last the fair musician paused, exhausted by her exertions, it was nearly eleven o'clock.

Wenlock hurried from the piano to Janet: all his anger had evaporated long ago, and he felt vexed at his own neglect.

Janet looked up smiling: "Thank you for your songs. I wish I could accompany you as Louisa can." Then, seeing Mrs. Webb suppress a yawn of weariness, she added, "It is not late, is it?"

Louisa smiled, and inwardly applauded Janet's self-control, but Wenlock could not help feeling stung that she had not missed him. He said good-night, and went away soon after.

"Have I been mistaken in her all this while?" he said to himself as he walked home. "If she had looked vexed when I went up to her just now, it would have been only natural, but I believe she was glad to be left alone. Does she love me really, or is she only holding to this engagement from a sense of duty? Ever since her mother's death there has been this strange reserved change in her manner." He walked on thinking. "It may be her sorrow, after all," he said, "and I am only behaving like a brute in wishing her to be different. Trials have come so fast upon her lately that it is cruel to expect that they will not deaden her for a time, at least, to

other thoughts, poor darling! I ought to be doubly tender and considerate toward her, instead of acting as I acted to-night."

He might have spared himself the remorse his hasty, generous nature suffered. Janet was far too much absorbed in thinking out her suspicions of Richard Wolferston and her plans for putting them into action to trouble herself with any feeling so petty as jealousy of Louisa Webb. It seemed to her selfish to think of her own happiness till her father's memory was vindicated.

She was not faultless: she was proud, self-reliant, and self-willed, but she was noble-minded and generous-hearted: where she had once given her confidence she could not have withdrawn it without such a wrench as can come but seldom in a lifetime. Nothing could have made her stoop to the petty meanness, the small spites, by which women will rub all the bloom from their own lives and the lives of all who belong to them.

The fault of such great hearts is, that in what they think pursuit of duty they are too apt to sacrifice their own feelings, forgetting that if the hearts of others are bound up with theirs, they also must suffer.

CHAPTER XXXI.

JANET'S SCHEME.

ALMOST before Mr. Painson had settled himself at his desk next morning a lady was announced. He was surprised to see Janet Wolferston. He had not met her since her mother's death, and it seemed to him strange that she should be going about so soon by herself.

"I am not alone," she said, answering his surprised look. "Poor Thompson is staying at Mrs. Webb's till we can find a place for her, but I left her down stairs because I want to see you alone."

Mr. Painson smiled, but he soon looked grave when Janet told him the purport of her visit. As she went on his

interest plainly slackened, and when she said that her mother could not be sure that the will was signed, he shook his head impatiently: "My dear Miss Janet, you must excuse me, but that is so like a woman, to build up a history on what really has not a leg to stand on. Your father may have made another will, but if unsigned it is of no more use than this newspaper."

"But my mother did not say she was sure it was not signed."

"Well, then, the thing remains as it was. Still, I can't think that any one so sharp as your cousin Richard would allow a duly-executed will to lie about where any one might find it, always supposing him to be cognizant of its existence; but perhaps you mean that Mr. Richard is ignorant of this other will?"

"Ignorant!" Janet's eyes flashed: she was indignant with Mr. Painson for his tameness and want of sympathy. "Why was the study kept locked, then? why did Richard never come to inquire for my mother?—for I wrote to him at once to say how ill she was. No, Mr. Painson: it is useless to try to shake my belief in his guilt: you yourself doubted the will at first."

"True, but I afterward told you that I had questioned the witnesses, and had no reason to doubt their signatures."

"But suppose the will to have been a forgery altogether, it would have been very easy to put the same date; and then, if the handwriting of these people were skillfully imitated, I cannot see how questioning them would serve you."

"Don't be in too great a hurry, my dear child. All these doubts occurred to me, but in my youth I was for some time with an expert, and I have not lost the practice I acquired with him. I dared not communicate my doubts to your mother till I could prove them, but as soon as I found that she would not let me attack the will on the plea of your father's mental incapacity at the time he executed it, I got both the witnesses to sign their names, and compared them with the signatures affixed to the will: they are identically the same. Richard

Wolferston may have done much in the way of undue influence, but you may be sure in your own mind, Miss Janet, that the will under which he holds the property is no forgery: he would not have left it in my hands, and have transferred the business part of it entirely to me, if he had been afraid of a flaw in it."

Janet did not interrupt him, but his words had not made the slightest impression on her conviction respecting the will. "All you say may be quite right," she said, calmly, "and yet the will my mother found may be that which my father really meant to leave behind him. Remember, she was not sure about the signatures. Now, Mr. Painson, you see it is lost time to try to persuade me out of this belief. What I have come to you for is to ask how I am to set about disputing Richard's possession of Rookstone."

Mr. Painson looked very grave: "In your sister's present state of health I should say, Do nothing at all; and indeed, my dear young lady, I scarcely see what you can do in any case. Supposing—and, mind you, I do not credit the supposition, but just for the sake of argument we will suppose—that will in the study to be genuine and fully executed, how are we to get at it? If your brother-in-law be what you think him to be, he will destroy it on the first hint of a contest, and then where are you? You will have incurred all sorts of expenses—for there is no use in attacking Richard Wolferston except in a formal legal manner—you will have created family disunion, have brought yourself under public notice, to serve no purpose."

Janet made no answer: she leaned back in her chair, thinking. Her judgment had always been clear, but the excitement which had possessed her since the previous evening had added wings to her thoughts and had given a power of rapid invention which by nature she had not.

Mr. Painson did not disturb her: he knew Janet to be capable of reflection—a capacity he denied to the general-

ity of womankind—and he fondled his chin complacently with his left hand and decided that his last argument had proved a "settler."

She turned round abruptly, her animated face lit up by a glow of unusual excitement: "But if a credible witness could see the will and swear to the signatures, would not that be sufficient to establish the case?"

"If— Why of course it would place Richard Wolferston in an awkward position; but we are talking in the clouds. Any one who could see the will, supposing it to exist, must see it without Richard Wolferston's knowledge, and I can scarcely tell how this could be managed: it would be almost as easy to get possession of it, eh?"

He looked half mockingly, half inquiringly, into Janet's eyes, for their expression roused his curiosity.

"And supposing the will, or an accurate description of it, were brought to you, you would undertake to see my little Christy righted?"

"If the moon falls at my doorstep to-night, I promise you a slice," he laughed. "My dear child, you are left alone in the world now, and have only me to advise you: pray be careful—think of the scandal and distress you would bring on yourself by an unsuccessful suit against your brother-in-law. He is very clever, and, I am afraid, not over-scrupulous: take my advice and let well alone."

"Good-bye," said Janet: "you are a dear kind friend, Mr. Painson, although you are so very cautious."

She pressed his hand warmly: he seemed the last relic left of the old life at Rookstone, and she went back to Mrs. Webb's to develop into a practical shape the sudden and singular idea that had darted into her mind in Mr. Painson's office.

Mary had not yet written to her: she had been too ill to do so, and Janet had mentally decided that, with her present feelings toward Richard Wolferston, she could not go to Rookstone; but now she took a different view. If Richard was not the rightful possessor, why

should she shrink from accepting his hospitality? In her self-imposed character of redressor of Christy's wrongs and her father's memory she persuaded herself that anything was to be attempted for the end to be attained.

If she had not been carried away by her intense purpose, she must have shrunk from the step she now contemplated, but when Christy was safe in bed she sat up long into the night, revolving the project which seemed to have become the one aim of her life.

She waked in the morning with an unusual feeling of disquiet and dissatisfaction.

A letter for her was lying on the breakfast-table. As she read it the clouds cleared from Janet's face. It was plain that she was in the right way: here it was smoothed for her.

The letter was from Mary: she was still very ill and weak, and she should be so glad to see Janet. Would she come to her the next day for a few weeks? She was sure Janet would like to see baby; and then, in a few sorrowful words at the end, the poor girl spoke of her mother, and of the longing she felt to hear all the details of her illness.

Janet hesitated as to whether she should acquaint Mr. Painson with her visit. Why should she do this?—he would only send her a budget of cautions which would make her angry with him and do no good. She must tell Henry Wenlock, of course. Mary said that both she and Richard would be glad to see Henry, but Janet knew that her lover resented Richard's usurpation far too keenly to allow him to accept his hospitality, and she was glad of this. She wanted to be alone at Rookstone, free and unwatched by any one who took a special interest in her.

She wrote at once to accept Mary's invitation.

"You will not mind losing me for about a week, Christy dear?" she said to her little brother when he came home to dinner, for it was a half holiday.

Christy's face lengthened. "Louisa laughs at me so," he said: "I hate girls

to laugh at one; and do you know, Janet, I believe I hate Cousin Webb?—she says I'm to call her Mrs."

"Well, that is not such a great crime, Christy dear." She put her arms fondly round the boy and kissed him.

"It isn't that. I'm not such a baby as that," he said, indignantly; "but when you find fault with me, Janet, you do it seriously, and unless I am naughty I know it is for my good; but Cousin Webb's way is different. I'm not saying it to tell tales, but that way she has of laughing and half scolding makes me as angry as anything. If she were only a boy, I know I'd give her a licking."

"Oh, Christy!" and his sister looked distressed, for she began to fear that in her absence matters might grow serious: "you will try and be good while I go away, won't you? I will not stay a day longer than I can help, darling," and she hugged him closely to her. "I am not going to please myself: try and think of your lessons, and I will ask cousin to invite your friend Roger to spend next half holiday with you, and Henry will be sure to come and see you."

The last promise seemed to give the greatest comfort.

"I wish you would make haste and marry Henry," the boy said: "he is a regular jolly fellow, and treats me as if I really was his own brother. He's different from Richard. Janet," he said, looking very serious, "do you think Richard is kind to Mary, now there is no one left to take care of her?"

"Yes, I think so—dear mamma thought so. But now remember what I said about cousin: try not to be saucy—you will soon have me back, you know; and, dear Christy, we are only here for a little while, so we must try and make the best of it."

Janet did not like to encourage the child in angry, dissatisfied thoughts, and yet she had already seen enough of Mrs. Webb in her own home to be sure that Christy could not benefit by maintaining any close intimacy with his cousins.

But she was to start for Rookstone

to-morrow, and her head was too busy with the scheme she had resolved to execute to give much thought to anything extraneous. Christy and his vexations were soon forgotten, and herself and the part she was to play again became paramount.

There is no subject of contemplation so fascinating as self: it may tempt us in the way of self-worship as to our outward appearance or self-esteem respecting our mental powers, or worse, and more ensnaring than all, under the pretence of humility, self-contemplation.

Janet did not write to Henry to announce her intended journey till evening. She meant to start early next morning, but it seemed to her that the plan she had laid down must unravel this secret which seemed to stand as a barrier between herself and her promised husband; and although she tried to believe that as yet he was not aware of any estrangement between them, still the restraint the secret imposed had become to her so painful that she resolved not to risk the chance of seeing Henry again till she had accomplished her purpose.

She would not leave Rookstone till she had found entrance to her father's study and seen the will, the discovery of which, as she firmly believed, had caused her mother's death.

CHAPTER XXXII.

KITTY AGAIN.

JANET was at Rookstone, but two days had gone and she had made no progress in the search she had resolved on. Both doors of the study were locked. She had searched in every likely place, but she could find no trace of the key. Just now, in talking to Mary, Janet had said, carelessly, she should like to revisit their father's study.

"It is impossible, dear. I don't know why, but Richard always keeps the key in his pocket: he even scolded me during my illness because I left it in the saloon."

"You have had the key, then?" said Janet, eagerly.

"Yes, he gave it to me when he went to Scotland. I laughed at him and called it his Blue Beard's chamber, for he said I had better not go into the study myself, nor let any one know that I had the key; and would you believe it, Janet, I was so careless that on the very evening poor Jem Robbins took me for a pheasant—I always tease Kitty about this, although of course the poor fellow fired at a pheasant—just because the key felt heavy in my pocket, I took it out and put it on one of the chimney-pieces in the saloon! I think Richard said somebody unlocked the door and went in, but I was so ill that I don't quite remember; and then you know came the news of dearest mamma's illness. Oh, Janet, how I envy you—you who were with her till the last!"

Mary lay back on her sofa, crying bitterly: she had not yet left her room, as she was still too weak to bear any extra fatigue.

At another time Janet would have soothed her and shared in her sorrow, but Mary's words had so completely realized her mother's story that she could think of nothing else.

It was a dull, lowering afternoon. Richard had gone out shooting, and had said he should not be in till dinner-time.

He had given Janet a cheerful welcome to Rookstone, but she had been much struck by the change in his appearance and manner—a change which her mother's report on her first return to Brompton had not in any way prepared her for. He was so terribly aged! he looked careworn and haggard. When they were alone together at breakfast and dinner he never spoke unless Janet addressed him, and then he seemed to force an unnatural cheerfulness.

Was he afraid of her? Janet asked herself, or was he haunted by the remembrance of his crime?—for that he was criminal she never doubted. Had she known how terrible his anxiety had been about his wife, and how great a shock he had sustained in finding her mother, as he thought, lifeless on the

floor of the study, she might have been more merciful in her judgment.

But Janet was in no mood for mercy. Wrought up, as she believed, to a high purpose—the purpose of redressing her brother's wrongs and vindicating her father's justice—she never looked on the other side of the picture. She never thought of the possibility of Richard's innocence, of her sister's shame and misery should he be proved guilty: she was wholly bent on discovering a means of access to the study. She came down from Mary's room and looked at the closed door, and it seemed to her that this mystery about the key was a fresh proof of Richard's guilt. The difficulty of getting possession of this key—for it was not likely that Richard would again trust it to his careless wife—had thrown Janet into a renewed perplexity, and she had quitted her sister hastily to think it out.

Mary had announced her intention of coming down next day into the saloon, and her presence would interfere with Janet's freedom of action. It was more than probable, too, that Richard would be so delighted to have his wife down stairs again that he would stay indoors, and Janet felt that it was only in his absence that she was fearless. The gaze of those dark, penetrating eyes seemed to paralyze her wits. What she had to do must be done this afternoon. There were still three hours of daylight left, and then there would be an hour of darkness before Richard came in. She seated herself with her back to the window, and resolutely closed her eyes, so that no object should divert her thoughts. A whole hour passed, and still she had not stirred: her brain remained blank and empty. The clock on the mantelshelf struck three-quarters past two: the silver tones seemed to mock her, and she started from her seat and paced up and down the saloon—up and down till she stood still before one of the windows and looked out over the park. How beautiful the trees were in their golden and russet foliage, as bright as the many-tinted pheasants that every now and

Janet showed suddenly through their laughs! The peacocks were in their customary place on the terrace wall, everything was as it used to be, and yet Janet all was altered.

"But it need not be altered," she said passionately: "if I had only courage and resolution and wit enough, I should devise a means for restoring his rights to my dear little Christy—"

And Henry too: he had been defrauded of the portion he expected to receive with her. What could she do? and as she asked herself the question it was answered. She would go and consult Kitty Robbins. From her mother's account the old woman had not overcome her dislike to Richard Wolferston: it would not, therefore, be creating any fresh prejudice against him if she took her into counsel.

She went up stairs to her own room and got her hat and cloak. The rain was beginning to fall, but she took no heed of it: she was too much absorbed in her purpose. No heed did she take, either, of Monsieur François Leroux.

He was standing just outside the open hall door, but he watched Janet's movements attentively. Then shrugging his shoulders as she went into the saloon again dressed for walking, he said, "I shall never arrive to understand these English: they are too profound for me. Here is a young lady—pretty, amiable, and as she should be—she come to see madame, her sister, who, Eulalie tell to me, she love very much. Well, what do she do? These two days I observe her. She stay very little up stairs in madame's room: she walk always alone about the house; and now this afternoon the squire have gone out for longer time than ordinary, and instead of being with her sister to make themselves cheerful together, she come down stairs with a so serious face, and she walk out in the rain. It is a thing not to be believed—a nice delicate young lady to leave a pretty, comfortable room, where she have a friend who can speak with her, and with whom she can enjoy, and go instead into the rain and dirt, and spoil her toilet and her boots!"

If he had seen the state of Janet's boots when she reached Kitty's cottage, he would have congratulated himself on his foresight.

It seemed as if the weather was against her project, for the path she took was narrow, bordered on each side by tall grass and weeds, and long before she was halfway on her journey these became so completely saturated with the fast-falling rain that she might almost as well have walked through water.

"Well, sure, Miss Janet! who'd a thowt o' seeing 'ee?" and Kitty started up to welcome her visitor, and let fall the ball of yarn off which she was knitting Jem's new winter socks. "Sit 'ee down close agen the fire"—she was dusting a chair with her apron while she spoke—"and let I see to 'ee bits o' boots."

But Janet refused to change these: she had but little time, she said, and she could not spare a moment of it: if she got her boots off, she much doubted being able to get them on again.

"Now, Kitty, listen: I will come and see you again and talk over old times, and tell you about Christy and all you want to know; but now I want your help, for I am in great trouble."

The keen face eyed hers shrewdly, and then resting her chin between both her shriveled hands, the old woman sat, intently listening.

"The second time that my mother was here," said Janet, "she went into my father's study, and she saw something there which—which—it is of great importance to me to see also. But I find that the study door is always kept locked, and I have reason to believe that even if I asked Mr. Wolferston for it, he would not give me the key. Now, Kitty, I have come to you for help: I know you are very quick-witted, and I think you may be able to hit on some plan by which I can get into the study without the squire's knowledge."

She left off speaking, but Kitty made no answer: she seemed to be studying her visitor's face, while a scornful look spread fast over her own. "Miss Janet,"

she said, "I be old, but, as 'ee wur sayin', I hanna lost the wits God gived I, and they be sharp 'uns: Miss Janet, they be sharp 'uns enough not to let I go into nothink blindfold. Do 'ee think, miss, as Kitty be too old an' foolish to guess whatten your blessed mother seed in that there room? 'Ee be a lady bworn, miss, and knaws better than a auld gowk such as I, but I'll lay 'ee've got scent o' another will now, or 'ee'd not be in such a caddle."

The color rushed up to Janet's temples: she felt ashamed of her want of confidence. How could she expect this old woman to run a risk in her service if she only treated her as a blind instrument?

She took one of the wrinkled hands in her own: her eyes glowed with excitement and youth as she stood before Kitty, her dripping garments clinging closely round her, while the old woman crouched in her high-backed chair, her blue gown and apron and spotless white neckerchief thrown into high relief by the glancing firelight. She kept her keen eyes fixed sternly on Janet, as if she would force the truth from her, whether she willed it or not.

"You are right, Kitty, and I was wrong: well, it was a will that my mother saw, but she was not sure that it was signed."

"And what wur the matter o' that?" Kitty's eyes flashed out under her thick irregular brows and her voice grew shrill as she went on: "Roight must be roight: let the writin' be as it may, if yer father willed the squoire to be measter o' Rookstone, let he bide measter, but if him hav' wronged Measter Christy, the real squoire's own darlin', let he look to heself. I allus said I'd ferret out the rights o' it some day, but I'se na lookin' for the day to come so soon." She had kept hold of Janet's hand while she spoke, and now giving it a painful grip she let it fall and stood erect, as if to show that she was ready to obey orders.

"Can you think of any way by which I can get into the study?" said Janet, eagerly, for she knew how fast time was flying.

"There's the winder," said Kitty, with the singular promptitude which distinguished her from most old women.

Janet shook her head: "I thought of the window: if it looked on to the terrace it would be easy, but those side windows are at such a height from the ground, no trees or anything to help a climber; and besides, Kitty, the study window is sure to be bolted inside."

"Then that be just what it be sure not to be," said Kitty, triumphantly; and if François Leroux had seen the malicious twinkle in her eyes, he would have pronounced her more like a witch than ever. "I'se na helped they lazy gals up at t' house so oft not to know summat about they fastenings. The real squoire hated fastenings: him say to I, 'Kitty,' him say, 'I loike to open my window when I will to open he—dwoant ye bother I wi' no bolts,' an' if so be as that there room beant used since, I ask ye how should the bolt be fast now? Not it, 'ee may make sure o' thatten."

"Well, but—" Janet spoke doubtfully, for she was only half convinced—"supposing I find the window unfastened, how can I get to it? I cannot climb up the bare wall; besides, I should be seen by some one."

"That 'ere be true, miss," Kitty mused: even she considered this a real difficulty.

Presently she began muttering to herself: "Them be roipe, and them dwoant ought to be left hangin' for the bottle-flies to spile. Tell 'ee what, Miss Janet," she said, turning round with a broad smile on her face, "'ee may go home as fast as 'ee loikes, and leave Kitty to do 'ee business. Dwoant 'ee be seen goin' fro' the park: that be my way, and our roads dwoant oughtened lie together. Well, Miss Janet, betime 'ee're standin' below t' study winder, may be 'ee'll find Kitty there wi' a key as'll let 'ee in."

Janet questioned, but she got no answer, except a recommendation to be off as fast as she might if she did not want Kitty to be on the ground first.

Janet departed, half satisfied: she knew that the road was much the long-

est, but she knew, too, that the old woman was right in saying they ought not to be seen together.

Kitty stood looking after her: "Her be loike she's father, after all. I would na' ha' thowt it, such a serious, quiet lass— But I maun be gwoin', or she's young legs 'ull beat my old 'uns." She wrapped herself up warmly, and even then she shuddered a little at venturing her rheumatic bones into the rain; but it was not quite such a downpour as Janet had met with, and Kitty was better defended, and had, moreover, a huge gingham umbrella. "Us'll see this day," she said to herself as she trudged along, "what gratitood there be in men-folk. I'se na' asked my neyva Paul for a good turn since I got he the garden place at Rookstone: him wur a good lad onst, and I wur all a same as a mother to he till him wur saxteen an' more; but I dwaont believe in ne'er a man alive except my gowk of a Jem."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AT MRS. WEBB'S.

THERE was company at Mrs. Webb's—Mrs. Dawson, Henry Wenlock, and a Mr. and Mrs. Buchanan, a tall, insipid man lost in the contemplation of his own beard, and his wife, a fat, comely lady of about forty, so round, so smooth, so smiling, so full of her own perfections, that you found yourself wondering whether she made life as easy and full of sunshine to those around her as she evidently did to herself.

She had just come over from Paris, and Louisa could not take her eyes off the novel arrangement of her head-dress.

"So striking, so elegant!" she sighed: "ah, if mamma would only let me keep a French maid! How I do hate everything English!"

Louisa continued in a lackadaisical state all through dinner, although Henry Wenlock, who sat between Mr. and Mrs. Buchanan, did his best to amuse her. In Janet's absence, Miss Webb did not feel half as anxious to captivate him.

Secretly, Wenlock was very dull him-

self: he had only accepted Mrs. Webb's invitation because Janet had asked him to take every opportunity of seeing Christy during her absence, but he had looked for a letter from her that morning, and it had not come. He was not in the best temper in the world.

He thought Mrs. Buchanan, with her winning ways and incessant display of white teeth, an insufferable mass of conceit; but she never discovered his dislike: it could not have occurred to this lady that any one could help being charmed with her. It was a refuge to Henry to turn to Louisa.

Up stairs, while Louisa, seated on a stool at Mrs. Buchanan's feet, was endeavoring to elicit the secrets of the new *coiffure*, Mrs. Webb took Mrs. Dawson into counsel: "Poor Janet! she is so very eccentric—never consults me about the smallest trifle. I believe she has more confidence in that woman Thompson: between ourselves, I think she is a trifle touched in the head."

"Who—Thompson? Dear me! that is sad, when you think she has her bread to earn and all; and you know there was a lady's-maid who cut her mistress's throat from insanity—so easily done, too, in putting on your cap or anything. Now I come to think of it, Thompson has put mine on for me often at Rookstone. Dear me, Mrs. Webb! I wish you hadn't told me—you have given me quite a turn."

The gentlemen came up and the conversation became more general.

There was a lamentation from Mrs. Webb because Mrs. Buchanan, who had a reputation as a musician, had nearly cut the top of her thumb off in carving for a party of friends at luncheon, and was consequently disabled; but the fat, round dame made quite as much market out of her chopped thumb as she would have afforded by her musical efforts. She had small, plump hands, and she held them up to designate the injured digit in such a fascinating, appealing manner that, while Mr. Webb thought her almost the most charming creature he had ever seen, Henry Wenlock felt as if he must leave the room at once.

"So unfortunate for me, is it not?" said Mrs. Buchanan, "for I use my hands."

"One would call a man who indulged in such antics an intolerable puppy," said Henry Wenlock to himself: "what must one call a woman?"

He had placed himself near the piano. Louisa was singing, and her mother attributed his movement to irresistible attraction.

Mrs. Webb was sitting beside Mrs. Dawson, near enough to be overheard by Captain Wenlock even when she spoke in a low voice.

"How fond he is of singing!" she said, designating Henry by a movement of her head.

Mrs. Dawson looked, and fell into the trap at once. "How much Louy has improved!" she said; and then, lowering her voice, "Don't you think it a great pity for Henry's sake that Janet can't sing?"

"Yes, it is a pity," said Mrs. Webb, thoughtfully, with a furtive glance every now and then toward the piano; "and yet it would be useless for her to try—she has neither ear nor voice. A wife who cannot play and sing is such a drawback to a man in society, especially if he sings."

She was perfectly aware that Henry Wenlock could not accompany himself.

"Why did you say Janet was eccentric just now?" said good, blundering Mrs. Dawson.

"Hush!" said Mrs. Webb, warningly: she saw Wenlock fidget, and she thought he would move away.—"Louy, love, can't you play that lovely little bit of Schubert?" and then, knowing that Louisa would keep Henry beside her to turn over her leaves, she answered Mrs. Dawson: "Well, I'll tell you what I mean, and leave you to judge. Of course I have a daughter of my own, and try to bring her up carefully. I do not set up for a strait-laced, prudish person, you know; but still, even I call it eccentric for so very young a girl to run after Mr. Painson as Janet does."

"Does she really, now?" said Mrs.

Dawson: she loved Janet, but gossip was as necessary to her as daily food.

"Oh yes—goes to his office, you know, and stays hours there, and never utters a syllable about it to any one."

"Well, but"—Mrs. Dawson's conscience reproached her for listening so quietly—"don't you think she goes, perhaps, by Captain Wenlock's wish, and to consult Mr. Painson for him?"

"It may be so. I wonder the idea had not occurred to me; only Captain Wenlock does not give me the notion of a man who would let a woman manage either him or his affairs, he is so very manly and energetic."

"Then I am quite afraid Janet will be wasted on him," said Aunt Dawson, in the glow of confidence which a little special notice was sure to elicit from her, "for I don't know any one who is so well able to advise others: she would be quite a treasure to a weak husband, now, she is so thoroughly strong-minded; and I fancy she likes to rule."

Mrs. Webb laughed: "You know her so much better than I do, you see; but depend upon it, Mrs. Dawson, Janet will manage her husband. A strong-minded woman always rules after marriage—especially one who knows how to keep her own secrets; and I dare say it is all for the best: we, who are more yielding and dependent, only give our husbands much unnecessary trouble, I believe. Poor Louy! how she will cling to the opinion of the man she marries!"

"Poor Louy" was left to finish her romance alone. Henry Wenlock had never been noted for self-control, and he had no idea of exerting it on the present occasion. Against his will he had heard every word of this conversation: it was impossible to him to remain quiet and talk drawing-room platitudes for the rest of the evening with such a turmoil of vexed thoughts in his mind.

Mrs. Webb protested against his departure, but secretly she rejoiced at the effect of her words. She read in his face that he was vexed and anxious.

"If I can once make him thoroughly jealous," she said, "it will do: it is only

a preconceived idea of Janet, I believe, that holds him to this unsuitable engagement. Once his eyes are opened, he must love Louy, and what a blessing it will be in every way to get her married!"

Captain Wenlock was very angry: at first he had heard incredulously, but then he suddenly remembered that on his last day of freedom he had asked Janet to go with him to a photographer's, as he was not satisfied with the likeness he had of her. Janet had refused, on the plea of a previous engagement, and when he inquired into its nature, she told him it was only a matter of business. She had smiled certainly, and had seemed really sorry to disappoint him; but Wenlock abhorred mystery, and the notion of a wife who could keep her own secrets was most jarring to his warm-hearted, impulsive nature. He saw no impropriety in her consulting Mr. Painson—the man was old enough to be her father—and yet he felt stung that she should do this unknown to him.

"She is almost my wife"—he walked slowly back to Jermyn street—"and my wife must trust me wholly: she shall be as free as air, and manage just as she pleases, but there can be no true love where there is even a shadow of concealment."

With the word "manage" came the remembrance of the rest of Mrs. Webb's words. He would have despised himself if he had been aware that they moved him. He almost thought he should prefer a silly wife to one who would "manage" him.

He had intended to write to Janet that evening: he wanted to tell her he had seen Christy, and to implore her to write more frequently: now he should wait till she wrote again.

"As to mysteries," he said, "the first time I get Janet alone I will know the truth of this Painson business. What is the use of going on with doubts and heartburnings, when a few simple words will set all straight?"

And Henry Wenlock went to sleep, persuaded in his honest single-heartedness that if all the folks in the world

would speak only plain truth, and the whole truth, about everything to each other, all the wrongs of life would be righted.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

JANET'S DISCOVERY.

MEANTIME, Kitty had reached the kitchen-garden: she went prowling about, first into a potting-house, then into tool-sheds, and at last, seated on some bass mats, with a pipe in his mouth, she found Paul Robbins.

He started at the sight of his aunt, and grew pale through his dark gypsy skin. Sharp-eyed Kitty noticed these signs, spite of the waning light, and knew that she had him at an advantage. "Well, Paul, my lad"—she spoke heartily—"I be right pleased to see 'ee. Since 'ee's na come to see I, I be come to see 'ee instead. What do 'ee think o' that?"

Paul muttered something about his being always too busy to go anywhere, and dexterously, as he thought, hid his pipe out of sight.

"Dwoant 'ee stow e'er baccy away for I, lad," said Kitty, chuckling grimly at the lad's discomfiture: "'ee be so busy allus, be ye? I dwoant know, lad, what 'ee calls b'sy, but I'se na call it busy to be let smoke baccy afore dark, and t'other chaps hard at work yet."

Paul saw there was no help for it, so he made the best story he could. His first situation had been in London, and a year or two there had taken much of his native dialect away.

"Be quiet," he said, in an earnest whisper, "will ye? It be as much as my place be worth if Mr. Tompkins or one of the gardeners should hear that I was smoking: it be only," he said, turning his face away from the keen eyes, "as I've a bad toothache, and I've heard say baccy be good for it."

"Dwoant 'ee mak' excuses," said the indignant old woman: "if 'ee wants I'se na to tell tales, 'ee be taking the wrong road, my lad. I knaws what ye been arter, an' now, sin' ye ha gi'en up work for 'eeself, happen 'ee'll do a stroke for Kitty."

Paul professed himself willing and able to do anything she might require. He knew her to be universally respected among the few old servants left at Rookstone, and among these was Mr. Tompkins, the head-gardener, a strict disciplinarian, who punished "loafing" by dismissal.

"Our pears be roipe, lad," she said, gravely, "and Jem him be feared to ask for the loan o' a pair o' steps; so, thinks I, Paul, him beant done I so much as one good turn since I spoke to t' old madam to get he put in t' garden-work; an' I say I knows Paul wonna say nay when I ask him for the steps to gather in the pears."

"I'll carry 'em down to the lodge this evening," said Paul with alacrity.

"Thank thee, lad, there be no need. Set 'em thereabouts among t' shrubs where I be a gwoin' to show 'ee, and my Jem 'ull carry 'em down for I, and bring 'em back while 'ee be a thinkin' o't."

Lazy Paul made no objection, and Kitty led the way triumphantly, followed by the dark-browed, lumbering fellow with a pair of high steps on his shoulder.

It has been said that the saloon formed the garden frontage, flanked at either corner by a large circular room, the great dining and drawing-rooms. The terrace extended to the angle of these, and then the ground sloped abruptly downward, so that the windows on the left side of the house facing the avenue—and the study window was one of these—were at the height of some ten or twelve feet from the ground. There was a thinly-planted shrubbery just below the study window: through this ran a graveled path communicating with

the carriage-sweep in front: beyond the gravel path the shrubbery was much thicker.

As Kitty drew near the graveled walk from the thicker side of the shrubbery, her sharp eyes spied some one beneath the study window. She made a sudden halt and turned to her nephew:

"This be nigh enow, and thank 'ee, Paul; an' the next time 'ee smokes so early dwoant 'ee do it nigh o' them bass mats: they be rare 'uns for catching light, that them be."

Paul made off hastily, leaving the steps where she bade him, and Kitty chuckled at the hold her discovery had given her over what she termed "a loafing vagabond."

As soon as he was out of sight she moved cautiously forward till she reached the graveled path, and then she stood still dismayed. She had felt sure she saw Janet's waterproof cloak beneath the study window, and she had dismissed Paul lest he too should see it.

The place was vacant now, but at the angle of the house nearest the hall entrance she caught a glimpse of Mr. François Leroux.

"The black-bearded rascal!" ejaculated Kitty: "him be makin' he's hay in sunshine. Smokin' he's nasty cigars in the very front o' t' house! I jist hope he's measter may ketch him at it."

The rain had ceased: she looked up longingly at the clouds, still moving too swiftly to promise any long cessation of the showers. Spite of her rheumatics, Kitty would have given much to ensure another torrent of rain, for she knew this would drive the Frenchman off the field. He was not in sight now, but she felt that he was walking up and down the front of the house.



PART VI.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—*Continued.*

"BE him set on to watch?" she asked herself, anxiously; and then she held her breath with excitement, for this time she had not deceived herself. There was Janet in her dark-gray cloak, peeping round from the back angle of the building. Kitty dared not speak or move, or give the slightest indication of her presence. She must trust that Janet's own discretion would keep her from making a rustling among the shrubs, for Leroux would be back in another minute. Yes, here he was, and Kitty almost groaned in her agony of apprehension. Her fear was for Janet. She herself had a perfect right to be standing where she was, at the entrance of a winding path in the thick shrubbery, leading away to the distant out-houses; but a young lady like Miss Wolferston had "no call," as Kitty said, "to be jammed up against the wall, ankle-deep in the soft wet mould, and hiding among they dripping shrubs." All she could hope was that in the fast growing darkness Monsieur François would not distinguish either of them; but still Kitty knew that she dared not attempt the risk of carrying the steps out of their hiding-place till the Frenchman was fairly off the premises.

"Them be rare fickle 'uns, be furriners. Maybe him'll soon tire o' prancing up and down loike a bantam cock. It be a wonder him stay here at all wi' ne'er a body lookin' at he. If Muss Janet 'ull bide still, us'll tide over yet, unless him be set on to watch."

It seemed to be as she had hoped: the clouds moved more and more swiftly, until, rolling themselves into one dense leaden knot overhead, they seemed to hold counsel together, and then,

parting in sudden discord, poured down their wrath in liquid torrents.

Janet pressed yet more closely against the wall for shelter, and poor old Kitty was glad to crawl under the drooping branches of a copper-beech tree to escape the violence of the storm.

As to Monsieur Leroux, he dashed into the hall, objurgating and gesticulating at this *vilain* climate, which gave to a poet no opportunity of refreshing his ideas by a contemplation of Nature.

But the brave old woman knew that while the furious rain lasted she and Janet might pursue their schemes in safety. She raised the steps, and although she staggered under their weight, she carried them out from behind the shrubs across the graveled walk toward Janet's hiding-place. She could scarcely see her young lady now, for a sudden increase of darkness had come with the storm.

"Muss Janet," she whispered, "be ye there?"

Janet stood beside her in an instant, and half relieved her of her load. Poor old Kitty had not known till then how much too heavy a task she had set herself.

Neither of them spoke till the steps were firmly placed beneath the study window—no easy matter in this blinding, pelting rain—and on the sodden mould, into which they seemed each moment to sink deeper.

Janet's heart was throbbing wildly. Here was the moment for which she had planned and striven, and yet, now that the way was clear—that she had only to mount the steps and see with her own eyes the proof of Richard's guilt—she hesitated and drew back.

Kitty could not see her face plainly,

but she saw that there was a needless delay: "Coom, Muss Janet, pluck up a sperrit and climb up steps; I be a-gwoin' to sit on bottommost; no fear of slipping then—coom, up wi' ye."

"I'm not afraid of slipping, Kitty, but suppose the squire or any one should pass and see the steps? Had you not better lay them down among the bushes as soon as I'm up, and shelter yourself somewhere till I let you know I am ready to come down?"

"An' how'll ye do that? Let Kitty be, muss; if so be I can move they, maybe I'll lay they down; but I'se na gwoin' to stir fro' below the winder, an' if ye just say 'Kitty,' I be here, muss."

The old woman's bravery roused Janet, and she climbed quickly up the steps: the window-ledge was broad enough to stand on, and she tried to raise the sash. Yes, Kitty was right: it moved stiffly, but it was not bolted. It made a startling noise in opening, but this was no time for hesitation. Janet bent her head and stepped into the room. It was quite in darkness, but, with that mechanical memory which seems to serve us without our will, she remembered where she should find a taper and matches. How long it seemed before she found them! and her fingers trembled so that she thought the taper would never be lighted. The flame kindled at last, and then a sickening dread came over her lest the light should be seen from without. It flickered so wildly that she saw she must shut the window if she would not have it extinguished. She closed the noisy, creaking sash, and set the taper on the davenport. Fear seemed to leave her suddenly, and again the fierce desire to punish Richard and redress her brother's wrongs mastered her.

The key lay just within the desk. Janet had felt so sure that she should find the will stowed away as her mother had described it, out of sight, that it was almost a shock, when she opened the second drawer, to see at once a thick roll of paper lying in front.

She took it up eagerly. Her first intention had been to read it and replace

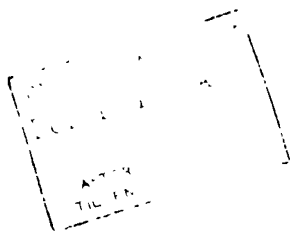
it in the drawer; but this seemed, not that she had seen it was a reality, but great a risk: she would take it just as it was to Mr. Painsion. She closed the half-opened drawer, replaced the key within the desk, and stooped to blow out the light. Then she hesitated. "I will see if it is signed first," she said "though I feel sure it must be."

At first she could not be quite sure where the end came, but when she had carefully looked through all the sheets she saw blank spaces left, evidently for signatures. A mist came over her eyes, and her hands shook as though they were palsied. Thought and recollection grew indistinct, and she sank into her father's high-backed chair—not with the bodily insensibility that had seized her mother in that fatal spot, but as utterly stupefied to outer things. Suddenly she started awake—a clicking sound roused her: she listened in a breathless agony of terror, for it seemed to come from the door leading into the saloon. All was still again: it had only been her fancy, but thought and memory came back tumultuously. What had she done?—effected an unlawful entrance into a house (and, for the first time, it struck her that it was unlawful) to prove what?—that which was simply unprovable, that which, in fact, had never been done; for unless two wills had been executed, Richard had not committed forgery. In her terror and utter revulsion of feeling—for she felt like a thief—she tried to open the drawer again, so as to replace the will and regain the window as quickly as possible; but the key slipped from her nerveless fingers and fell on the floor. It seemed to her impossible to find it in that vast darkness, and like some desperate animal she looked about her for a hiding-place into which she could thrust the will. As she grasped it a new thought dawned. Why did she not read it, and see wherein it differed from that which had been declared genuine? Hurriedly, breathlessly, straining all her senses to gather in its meaning through the technical jargon, she made out that her father had appointed her



"You will not refuse to give me this will?"

[Rookstone. Page 83.]



mother sole guardian of Christy, and that Rookstone had been left unreservedly to him—her mother amply dowered, and she and her sister handsomely provided for. Legacies to old servants, friends—all unremembered in that will which had constituted Richard master of Rookstone—traits of kind thoughtfulness, so like her father that they seemed to bring him back, living, breathing, to her memory, stamped conviction on her mind as she read that these were his genuine intentions, and that, no matter how contrived, the other will was indeed a fabrication.

But the mystery seemed darker than ever. She looked eagerly on to see if Richard's name were mentioned. Yes, near the end: he was left a handsome sum of ready money. Her interest had conquered terror—past and future had become centred in trying to read this riddle.

Had fear been as powerful as when she first discovered that the will was unsigned, she must have heard a faint sound at the door leading into the saloon. She would not have started with such a shuddering cry of terror when the door itself opened and Richard Wolferston entered the study.

CHAPTER XXXV.

UNSIGNED.

FOR an instant neither of them spoke: then Richard Wolferston closed the door behind him and walked up to the davenport.

All Janet's courage had deserted her. In an inscrutable yet irresistible manner, it seemed as if she were the criminal, and Richard the person sinned against, and yet in her heart she still believed him guilty.

"Miss Wolferston," he said, sarcastically, "would it not have been easier to come in here by the door than by the window?—rather more in keeping, too, with the extreme respectability of the Wolferstons of Rookstone?"

He waited, but she could not answer. A weaker woman would have got rid of some of her alarm in words or tears,

but Janet sat trying to collect her scattered wits before she spoke.

"I keep this room locked up," he said, quietly, "because I have never yet had time to examine your father's papers. It would have been better in all ways if you had mentioned your wish to look through them with me." He glanced at the parchments before her. "As it is," he spoke faster and more roughly, "I consider your behavior unjustifiable. Do you know that if you were not my wife's sister I should feel myself tempted to give you in custody?"

It seemed to Janet that this anger was assumed—that he was seeking to make her quarrel with him. "Would you have given me the key of this study if I had asked for it? If you would have done this, you will not refuse to give me this will."

She fixed her eyes on his face, and she fancied that he grew paler, but the light was so indistinct that she could not be sure.

He came still closer, and took up the roll and opened it. "This," he said, when he had examined it for some minutes—"is this the only one you have found? Surely, there must be several others? You know, of course, as well as I do, the mania that possessed your father latterly respecting wills. I fully expected him to die without executing one of the numerous forms he caused to be drawn up. Why should I give you this?—it can serve no purpose. I imagine you have satisfied yourself that it is neither signed nor witnessed?"

"It is not, and yet"—she spoke sternly, for she felt that there could be no longer the disguise of even outward civility between herself and Richard—"I believe this to be my father's genuine will, and that by which you hold possession here, a fabrication."

He pressed his lips tightly together. Her boldness had taken him by surprise. Was it not enough to find her at this time of night forcing a secret entrance into his house like a burglar?—and instead of confusion and terror, she carried her insolence so far as to accuse him.

"If I answered you as you deserve to be answered," he said, "I should at once tell you to leave the house; but you are Mary's sister, and are therefore protected from my just anger. I hope and expect you will quit Rookstone to-morrow. I will account to Mary for your sudden departure. As to your accusation, you may, perhaps, regret your strange behavior if I swear to you by all you hold most sacred that your father's signature and those of the witnesses are as genuine as that he was your father. Take them, test them as you will in any court of justice, and you will only find yourself convicted of most unjust accusation and unfounded suspicion."

Almost the same words Mr. Painson had used. Janet's head seemed to spin round as she vainly tried to see light in this dark riddle: if Richard were indeed guiltless, what was she? Could it be possible that, trained as she had been, her heart was yet so evil as to have begotten and nourished this black suspicion against an innocent man?

Scales fell from her eyes. It had then been her father's habit to make and remake his will, and her mother had been led into the same error as she had been by the sight of the same document.

To Janet it was impossible to persist in error an instant after she saw it to be error. This first doubt of her own judgment reawakened the better nature which had been slumbering, and she felt impelled to atone at once for her wrong-doing. She was not convinced, but it seemed to her that she ought to be—that she had allowed herself to judge willfully.

"I have been wrong in suspecting you secretly," she said: "I ought to have told you my doubts openly. I cannot wonder at your anger. I shall certainly leave Rookstone to-morrow." She paused a moment: the expression of his face puzzled her, it was so set and hard. She began to see that Richard Wolferston was not a person to be offended with impunity. "You will not say anything to Mary—neither shall I:

she need never know I have doubted you."

He made no answer, except by opening the door for her to leave the study. As she passed him he said, abruptly, "You had better go at once to your room. I will explain your absence to the wretched old woman you have chosen to confide in." Then, seeing she was about to remonstrate, he spoke more harshly: "Miss Wolferston, I must be master in my own house: you have given scandal enough for one night. You are too young to know the serious injury that might result if this childish attempt of yours got talked about among the servants. I cannot allow you to hold any further intercourse with that woman Robbins: if you persist in resistance, I shall take some means of getting rid of her."

Something in his tone made Janet suspect that she had been watched: she felt powerless to strive against his will, and she went up stairs.

Richard stood watching her till she disappeared into the gallery: then he went back into the saloon, down the terrace steps, and in another minute stood below the study window. He had moved so quietly that Kitty had not known of his approach till he was close beside her and the steps.

"Now, Mrs. Robbins"—he could scarcely distinguish her in the darkness, but he spoke as assuredly as if he could see the sudden terror that had seized her—"take yourself off as fast as possible: you are a mischief-making old vagabond, and if it were not for Mrs. Wolferston you should find yourself in Staplecross jail before morning. Let me find you trespassing near the house again, and you leave Rookstone."

"There be two words wanted to that ere, squoire. I be no tenant o' yourn, and 'ee knows I beant: 'ee may keep I out o' the park, but 'ee can't turn I out o' the lodge, try as 'ee will."

"I'll have you transported for to-night's work if you say another word," he said, furiously.

Kitty hobbled away, though when she was, as she thought, at safe distance, she

called out, "Good-night to ye! Maybe ye'll carry them steps away: them 'ull tell tales to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CAPTAIN WENLOCK TAKES A RESOLUTION.

MRS. WEBB's feelings, both as a woman and a mother, were outraged by Janet's sudden return. It was against all precedent, to her well-regulated mind, for young ladies to fly about the country like birds, giving no hint of when they might be expected; and besides this, she had planned an excursion to the Crystal Palace with Henry Wenlock and Louisa: he had promised to come this evening and settle it, and at luncheon who should make her appearance but Janet Wolferston? Mrs. Webb met Janet with outstretched arms and a succession of small bird-like kisses. How pale and strange the girl looked!

"I wonder if there ever was insanity in the family?" thought Mrs. Webb. "I must consult her aunt Dawson, and I really think I ought to give a hint to Henry Wenlock."

Something more than Janet's changed looks puzzled her observant cousin: those small, hard, black eyes were taking in every word and gesture, while the girl sat in the dining-room.

Janet was so much gentler—Mrs. Webb could almost have said so much better-behaved: so much more humble would have been nearer the mark.

In the long night that had followed her interview with her brother-in-law, Janet had not slept: her self-reproach, her deep, heartfelt contrition, had been too keen, too overpowering. Like a lightning flash had come the revelation showing her the pride and self-confidence which she had mistaken for a high and noble purpose.

When such revelations come—and in mercy they are sent to some of us—reason seems almost to totter, while the mask that has so ingeniously aped the face of truth falls off, and as it falls shrivels into the nothingness it is.

All Mrs. Webb's little satirical silli-

nesses, once so stinging and offensive, fell unheeded on Janet's ear, or if heard were accepted as a deserved humiliation for her own overweening pride. Before she left Rookstone she had written to Mr. Painson, asking him to see her at ten o'clock next morning.

"I will tell him all," she said as she dressed for dinner: "it is only just to Richard to say that the will my dear mother saw was not signed: then if Mr. Painson says I am to dismiss all doubts, I will try hard to do so. I do not believe Richard guilty of forgery, but it is still impossible to me to think that he did not use his influence unfairly."

She felt that her mind must be made up one way or the other before she saw Henry again: it was so very hard to keep this secret from him, and yet her mother's prohibition had been urgent. If Mr. Painson told her that her father had really had the mania for making and remaking his will which Richard had asserted, it would lessen her doubts of her brother-in-law.

"If Henry is to be his brother, too," she ended, "why should I prejudice him still further against Richard by speaking of last night's work? I wish ten o'clock to-morrow were here."

She went down stairs. Henry was in the drawing-room talking to Louisa Webb. Janet's surprise at seeing him gave her manner an increase of restraint.

Ever since the evening of Mrs. Webb's dinner-party, Wenlock had been disturbed and restless. He thought that to ask an explanation in writing of Janet's reserve and mysterious ways would be to increase the barrier which, ever since her mother's death, had come between them—a barrier more keenly felt by himself than by Janet, for, as we have seen, her mind had been filled with the detection of Richard's guilt, to the exclusion of all else. Henry had determined the next time they met to make an appeal to her to restore the confidence which had once existed between them.

Louisa giggled when Janet came

"Mamma would not let me tell you he was coming," she said. "I suppose she thought you would enjoy the surprise of seeing Henry;" then, in a loud whisper to Janet, "So sorry, dear, the dinner-bell is just going to ring—no use in my running away, you know."

At dinner-time, as Henry Wenlock listened to Mrs. Webb's sillinesses, most of them on the topic of her own valuable qualities or covert censure of some of her neighbors, it suddenly came into his mind that here might lie the secret of Janet's absent, changed manner.

She might be unhappy with this foolish, spiteful woman. "All silly women are spiteful to those of more intellect than themselves. It is the old story of the Fox and the Grapes; and Janet is disgusted, too, with that assumptive fellow Webb's pomposity. Who on earth cares where his mutton was bred and his Burgundy grown? I hate to be told the history of all I eat and drink: if it were not for Janet, I'd never dine with the fellow again."

Just as the ladies were rising to go up stairs, the visit to the Crystal Palace was proposed to Janet by Louisa.

"I am very sorry, thank you, but I have a business engagement to-morrow."

No one answered, but Mrs. Webb gave Henry a significant and pitying glance.

"Only another reason," he thought, "for speaking to Janet at once. She shall not expose herself to that detestable woman's remarks and suspicions. Surely she would be happier in ever so humble a home of her own than in this family."

When he reached the drawing-room, Louisa was lounging in an easy-chair in a lackadaisical fashion: her mother was packing up and down the room, evidently restless and uneasy.

Henry knew that Janet had a private sitting-room, and he felt strongly inclined to ask if he could not have a few minutes' talk with her there; but before he could speak, Mr. Webb asked where Mrs. Dawson was.

"Mrs. Dawson! I don't know what you mean, John."

"Why, there was a ring: wasn't that Mrs. Dawson who arrived just now?"

Mrs. Webb's eyes looked brighter and harder than ever as she took a quick glance at Captain Wenlock to see if he were listening: "Oh dear, no!" with a slight toss of the head: "it was a visitor for Janet—a gentleman."

"A gentleman! what gentleman?" the words came from Henry before he knew what he was saying.

"Well, I don't know whether I ought to tell." Mrs. Webb gave her irritating little laugh. "Janet is so fond of secrets, you know; but"—an involuntary movement of Captain Wenlock's made her look at him—"don't look like that, pray, or I shall be in terror of some melodramatic scene taking place, and you know it's only my fun—nothing at all to wonder about if dear Janet were only a little more communicative."

"Who is it?" Even Mr. Webb had grown sufficiently inquisitive to be impatient.

"Dear me, John! why only old Mr. Painson; but Janet took him off to her own room in such a stage-struck, mysterious manner that I think she deserves a little teasing."

She spoke to her husband, but she kept her eyes on Henry Wenlock. He pulled his moustache as if he meant to root it out. He was too angry to speak. How could Janet expose herself to the ridicule of her empty-headed cousin by such absurdity? Why could she not have told him she expected the old lawyer? And then an angry flush rose on his forehead: Janet had not thought fit to apprise him of her return, but she must have written to Mr. Painson, or how would he have known it?

Half an hour passed, and Janet did not appear. Wenlock felt strongly tempted to send up a message to her room, but he shrank from Mrs. Webb's ridicule. If he could have heard the words that were being spoken up stairs, he would not have waited so patiently.

Mr. Painson was obliged to leave town for some days early the following morning, so he could not keep his appointment, and Janet's note was so

urgent that he had been unwilling to keep her in suspense till his return: he had therefore come to see her this evening. He listened attentively to her story. When she had ended, he blamed her for taking old Kitty into counsel. "Now," he said, "I suppose you want my opinion. I will give it to you on one condition—that you do not breathe a word of this business to any one."

"I only wish to tell Captain Wenlock," she said. "I think he ought to know."

Mr. Painson shrugged his shoulders and looked irritated. It was one of the blemishes on his favorite's good sense, he thought, that she should have cast in her lot with an impetuous, hairbrained fellow like Wenlock, just because he happened to be six feet high.

"Decidedly, no—the very last man in the world to confide in. What I mean, my dear child, is"—for Janet's face warned him of his imprudence—"that Captain Wenlock is not likely to be impartial in the matter: his feelings must naturally get the better of his judgment, and would urge him to take the very reverse line of action to that which I would suggest to you."

"Action! But it seems to me that there is nothing to be done."

"If you will promise to be guided by me, I'll tell you what I think about it," he answered. "It seems to me that there is much more hope of recovery for your little brother than I thought; but unless you promise not to open your lips to any one on the subject, I must decline to say more."

She hesitated: the old lawyer looked at his watch, as if he was in a hurry to leave her. "After all," she thought, "this time I am not seeking to guide myself, and the mystery must come to an end if open measures are adopted against Richard: it is only my own comfort with Henry that I sacrifice."

She gave the required promise, and then Mr. Painson spoke. The point that struck him was Richard Wolferton's assertion that the late squire had a mania for drawing up wills. This, he said, was entirely false: he had often urged his dear friend to make a will,

and he had invariably excused himself. He did not believe that, in the short time that had elapsed since he gave up the management of the property, a habit of this kind would have become fixed.

He asked Janet if she could remember the date of the will in the study.

"I do not remember taking it in distinctly at the time—you know I was still reading the will when he came in—but it seems to be a fixed idea with me now that it was dated May 25th."

"May 25th! Miss Janet, you must be positive: surely, if you tax your memory, you can be. If the will you saw was really dated May 25th, I feel nearly sure that it contains your father's real intentions. Now think—take as long as you like, only be positive."

He took a book from the table, put on his spectacles and affected to read it diligently.

Janet held her forehead with both hands, trying to concentrate thought on the events of the previous night: it seemed to her that she had seen May 25th, but Mr. Painson's words had attached so much weight to her answer that she dared not feel sure. Suddenly a new idea occurred to her. "Is that the date of the will that has been proved?" she asked.

"Yes," said Mr. Painson, gravely. "Now don't be like any other woman, and run away with the notion that it's all plain sailing, and that you have the clue in your hand: you have no proof against your cousin, remember. Simply, the only notion I have is that his keeping this unsigned will—in the event of his having exercised undue influence in persuading your father to make another, for this is all, I fancy, he has done, my dear child—I say the very circumstance of his keeping it shows that he has some conscience left, and if Christy outlives him, I should not be at all surprised at your cousin willing Rookstone back to him again. Let us see—is this baby a boy or a girl?"

"A boy."

"That's unlucky: however, it may not live. Don't look so shocked and

dear young lady: I only mean to tell you that all you have to hope for is from Richard Wolferston himself, and that any threat, or any attempt to make your doubts public, will only cause a family feud, and probably hinder your brother's chance of restitution. Now I must say good-night."

Janet followed him down stairs, perplexed and heavy-hearted. What could she say to Henry to explain her conduct? and how would it be possible to be happy and at her ease with him burdened with this secret, which might have to be kept for years?

CHAPTER XXXVII.

REFUSED.

JANET came into the drawing-room feeling like a criminal. She saw the cloud on Wenlock's face, and she knew she could not clear it away, but she went up to him at once: "I can go with you to-morrow, Henry: I am free of my engagement."

"Come down stairs into the dining-room," he said: "I want to speak to you before I go away." He turned to the door as he spoke.

Janet followed him in silence. Life was too hard to live. For more than a year she had been doing ceaseless battle with herself and her own inclinations. It seemed to her that duty always forced her to alienate the love she longed for. In childhood even she had known by a sure instinct that people esteemed her more than they loved her. She had not Mary's power of flinging herself into the hearts of others, even by the very charm of her willfulness; and now, except little Christy, no one really loved her but Henry, and she had condemned herself to the risk of losing this, the only happiness left her. She would not, she could not: it would be better, she was tempted to think, to break her promise to Mr. Painson.

But she dared not do this. She had done evil once that good might come, and what had come of it? There was no time for further parley with herself: she had reached the dining-room,

and Captain Wenlock closed the door. "Janet"—his voice was agitated—"I am going to be very plain with you, but I believe it will be happier for us both. Why have you secrets from me? What is this business you have to see Painson about? If I cannot help you in it, at least I could help to bear any trouble or annoyance it may cause you."

"You cannot, thank you." She spoke very quickly, but such a look of pain came into her face that he felt sorry he had spoken so urgently.

He took her hand in both hands. "Look here, my darling. I can't bear to vex you—you know that—but I don't think it is for our happiness to keep secrets from each other. Even if I were to say, as I feel inclined to say when I see that sad look in your dear eyes, that it makes no difference to me, it wouldn't be the truth, darling. Perhaps I'm too off-hand and open about things, but I can't get on with anything like a mystery, and I think it's safer and better in every way to say so at once."

"Yes, I know," said Janet, in the same dreamy voice. She longed to throw her arms around him and tell him how miserable she felt, but she could not. It seemed to her that Henry was really alienated, and her sorrow paralyzed her from trying to regain his love.

He waited a few minutes for her answer. "You will not give me your confidence, then?—you cannot trust me, Janet?" Her manner stung him out of all self-control: he let go her hand. "What am I to think? What has come over you, Janet, to change you so completely? If I have lost your confidence, at least I have a right to know how I have done it. You must tell me. I will not leave you till you have explained the change that has come between us."

He spoke vehemently. Her continued silence irritated him, as silence does irritate an angry man. More than this, all the vexation he had been trying to suppress since the evening of Mrs. Webb's dinner-party broke loose and added itself to his grievances.

Perhaps a man never loses his power so completely as when he reproaches a woman. There is something weak about reproach—something that reminds one of the small dog's yelp against the larger brother he is afraid of: besides, it is a woman's weapon, and some women abhor anything that savors of their own weakness as much as they honor strength.

Janet's heart seemed to turn to stone at his words. Had she no wrongs to complain of? Not against him; but had not she all her life been thinking more of the well-doing and happiness of others than of herself? and what had she reaped in return? The secret feeling that she was considered stiff restrained her, while all the time her heart was full of yearning love, which did not dare betray itself by demonstration lest it should meet with rebuff. Often she had envied her sister Mary's brusqueness: it seemed to give her such a bright, saucy power of saying out what she felt, without half the offence her own well-intentioned but abrupt reproofs occasioned.

But till now she had never felt this with Henry. He was the only being with whom she had been able to cast aside all reserve, to bare her heart's true feelings and be sure she was rightly read. And now he too was like the rest. He would not take her on trust: he only loved her, in fact, so long as she submitted implicitly to him.

Still, she did not answer him as a smaller-minded woman would have answered. Her hands were clasped tightly together, and that wistful look came in her eyes which a man often misreads in a woman—a look which says, "Be noble, be strong—be a rock for my feebleness to cling to."

"Henry," she said, "I am not happy, but till now you have never added to my unhappiness."

He had thought the look in her eyes an appeal to his submission, but her words conquered his doubts. He forgot Mr. Painson and all the causes of his vexation. Janet was unhappy, and he could comfort her.

He drew her fondly to him: her head nestled on his shoulder, as it had often nestled in brighter days, and for a moment it seemed to Janet, as they stood thus heart to heart, that true love and peace might return, spite of her secret.

"My darling," he whispered, "you cannot be happy with these people. I hesitated to ask you to come to such a quiet home as I can give you; but, Janet, why should we waste the happiness of being together in waiting for a few luxuries? You must be mine altogether, dearest: why need we wait?"

For a moment the warm blood spread over Janet's face. It seemed as if all of joy she had ever known had come back. To be always with Henry—his wife—away from unloving looks and tongues for ever! And then as quickly the warm blood receded, a hand of ice seemed to steal between his heart and her own, and she knew that this union could not be till she was free from her secret. But she dared not tell him this. She would be so watchful, so guarded over her own manner, that he should never discover she was keeping anything from him. He should never again complain of her reserve.

He took her silence for consent: he pressed her yet more fondly to him, and thanked her in glowing, joyful words for the happiness she had given him.

It was like sunshine in winter, and yet she must withdraw herself from it. The poor tried, aching heart shrank from the wrench she knew her next words must give; for to Janet's unsophisticated nature it seemed as if it would be impossible for a wife to keep a secret from her husband: it would be a transgression of the marriage vows. Henry had himself said he could not endure a secret, and yet she was determined that he should not know the real reason of her refusal.

A deep sob roused him from his joy. "Janet, my darling, tell me I am not deceiving myself."

"Not wholly," she said. "I love you more than ever, and yet I will not come to you as your wife till I can bring you a less sorrow-burdened heart."

tried to interrupt her, but she shook her head and burst into tears: "It is all so recent. I have hardly had time to realize that she has really left me. I know it is selfish to wish her here again; but oh, Henry, you cannot tell how sharp the agony is sometimes of feeling that I no longer have my mother to go to for counsel and help."

"But is not that the very reason why you should yield to my wishes? Surely in your own home you can be quieter, more to yourself, than you are among these frivolous Webbs."

"It is not that," she said. "I am not so selfish as to wish to shut myself up alone with my sorrow. I only want time to heal its first violence, and to soothe me into greater resignation than I am able to feel now. I don't want to bring mourning into your home, Henry: it is not fair or right toward you."

He urged her again, but at last he submitted, unwilling to distress her, though not convinced—not, however, till he had told her that on that day three months he should renew his claim and should take no second refusal.

As soon as he was gone Janet hurried to her room. Was life worth living on these terms? she asked herself. Was she never once in anything to seek her own pleasure or her own happiness? Would it not have been better to accept the great happiness she had just refused, and take the chance that her secret might mar its perfection? And then came back a sentence heard from her mother's lips in early childhood, which Janet had never forgotten: "We are never doing right, we are almost always doing wrong, when we are striving to please ourselves." "But it would not have been only to please myself. Surely Henry asked me as much for his own sake as for mine. I could make him so happy! What if I let this secret die away? We can take care of Christy between us, and leave Richard in peace at Rookstone." She sat still, her face buried between her hands, thinking. Common sense, common justice to Henry, every ordinary and superficial motive of action, bade her rest from

her self-imposed task. Scruples and doubts struggled to be heard, but she would not listen to them. She lay down to rest at last, half resolved to write to Henry and retract her refusal.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

PERPLEXED.

HENRY WENLOCK walked toward Vincent Square in a very ruffled state of mind. Since the night of Janet's return from Rookstone, the night when she had refused to become his wife at once, he had kept away from Mrs. Webb's.

Mrs. Webb's hints and suspicions had failed to make him jealous, but they had made him unwilling to see her again. He also entertained a hope that by leaving Janet longer than usual alone with her cousins she might be more inclined to listen to reason; or, in other words, to marry him. He had intended to go and see her on this evening, but in the morning he had received a note from Mrs. Webb. Could Captain Wenlock call on her at five o'clock? He would be sure to find her alone and disengaged. She wished to consult him at once on a matter which nearly concerned dear Janet. He did not like to refuse, and yet he shrank from this woman's interference. He resolved not to allow Mrs. Webb to enter into any explanation except in Janet's presence. Perhaps a secret hope that this meeting might break ground for a fresh state of things, might help his cause with Janet, had induced him to consent to it, although all the while he resented Mrs. Webb's meddling.

When he reached Vincent Square, her manner surprised him. Hitherto he had regarded her as a vain, shallow woman, flippant in her efforts to amuse and attract, spiteful where she could not succeed; but now she was perfectly quiet: she pressed his hand with a gentle, subdued tenderness that at once propitiated and alarmed him: he fancied that Janet was ill, and Mrs. Webb wished to prepare him.

He looked so disturbed that her concern increased.

"Where is Janet?" he said, abruptly: "I can see her, cannot I?"

"I am sorry to say you cannot," said Mrs. Webb; and then, seeing his dismay was as complete as she could wish for, she went on: "Janet is not here, and I do not feel quite sure that I know where she has gone to."

She spoke simply. She had by this time persuaded herself so fully of Janet's eccentricity that she had no occasion to exaggerate her feelings, and her intuitive penetration taught her that any trace of spitefulness would enlist Wenlock against her view of what had happened.

He answered her impetuously: "Not know where she is? What do you mean, Mrs. Webb? You are her mother's nearest relative: she placed herself under your care, and you are bound to protect her." Mrs. Webb gave him such a sweet sad look that he felt ashamed of his own hastiness. "When did she leave you?" he said, more quietly.

"I believe Janet to be quite safe," she answered; "but sit down, Captain Wenlock, and I will tell you all I know. Janet has been more silent and reserved than ever since that last evening you were here. Yesterday morning she went out early. Louisa offered to accompany her, but she refused to let her go with her in such a very decided manner that my daughter did not like to press it. She was away for some time, and when she came home stayed up in her own room the rest of the day. In the evening she sent down an excuse for not appearing at dinner. She wished tea to be sent up stairs to her. I went up with it myself. Janet looked a little pale, perhaps, but certainly not ill enough to keep her room; but when I questioned her she seemed unwilling to answer. I can scarcely tell you why—or at least I could tell you if I were not afraid of making you very unhappy—but I felt dreadfully anxious about her strange conduct. 'Where did you go this morning, Janet?' I asked, perhaps rather more urgently than I might had I felt less deeply. 'I had business to

attend to,' she said abruptly; and her face showed that she disputed my right to question her. Now, as you know, dear Captain Wenlock, she has always been so well brought up by that dear good mother of hers that it would scarcely have occurred to me to doubt the propriety of anything she chose to do but for the strange change that has come over her since that sudden return from Rookstone. No doubt she gave you a satisfactory explanation of it, but to us she said nothing."

Mrs. Webb paused here to give Wenlock opportunity to justify Janet, and for the first time he remembered that he had never so much as made a remark on the suddenness of her return on the night when she had refused to become his wife. He shook his head and listened eagerly for the rest of Mrs. Webb's story.

"This morning, as soon as breakfast was over, she asked if a cab could be sent for to take her to the Waterloo station. I said, 'Where can you be going, Janet?' and then, to my surprise, she said she was going to Rookstone. She could not say how long she should be away: she might stay there a fortnight or she might be back to-morrow. Really I felt so startled I scarcely knew how to answer her."

"I don't see anything remarkable about it," said Wenlock, stiffly. "I am afraid you have alarmed yourself and me very unnecessarily, Mrs. Webb. Why shouldn't Janet go to Rookstone?"

"Of course, the most natural place in the world for her to go to—the place she should never have left had I been consulted." Mrs. Webb's tone sharpened here, but she speedily recovered herself. "But, my dear Captain Wenlock, Janet has not gone *there*. I fear that was only a blind. As I stood at the open window I heard her tell the cabby to drive to Mr. Painson's."

Henry looked annoyed: "It is quite possible she called on Mr. Painson on her way to the station."

"But, Captain Wenlock, listen to me. When Janet came back to Rookstone she told Long

not likely to go there again for a long time to come. I know that she has not received a letter since her return, either from Mary Wolferston or from her husband, and Janet is not likely to go anywhere unasked."

Henry stood still thinking. His first impulse would have been to go down to Rookstone and ask Janet the meaning of this sudden departure. It seemed to him extraordinary that, without any summons, she should have gone off alone in this abrupt manner. And then he remembered a sentence of Mrs. Webb, and said, "What is it that you shrink from telling me because you are afraid of making me unhappy?"

"First of all, will you answer me one question? Are you still engaged to marry Janet?"

"I should scarcely have answered your summons so promptly if our engagement were ended. I don't think such a question admissible."

"Then I am very sorry I asked it." Mrs. Webb looked beseechingly up in his handsome face, quivering now with the emotion her words had created. "But I feared you suspected what I did, and had broken your engagement the last time you saw her."

"I do not understand you at all," he answered haughtily. "So far from any break between us, the very last time we were together I tried to persuade Janet to become my wife at once."

Mrs. Webb had a hard struggle to keep her mortification out of sight. "Perhaps, after all, I had better speak out," she said, in the wearied tone with which we yield up an unpleasant fact to our listener. "I have watched Janet attentively of late, and I regret to say that to me she betrays strong symptoms of the mental derangement which, of course, we must expect one or other of poor Christopher's children to inherit."

"Derangement! Mr. Wolferston was as sane as you are, Mrs. Webb," Henry Wenlock almost smiled, spite of his anger.

Mrs. Webb shook her head: "Ask Mr. Painson what he thinks about the vill. Why, he admitted to me on the

day of the funeral that he could not believe his old friend was himself when he executed it. If it is not the germ of insanity in Janet, I ask you to tell me what it is that has changed her so. She was a little odd for her age, perhaps, but she was a clever, lively girl, always ready to take the lead in conversation and to keep others amused. Now she sits moping all day, generally alone, or else she goes out on long, mysterious errands, and never opens her lips when she comes home. Was it not eccentric in a young girl of her age to send for Mr. Painson as she did that evening? But stay a minute, please;" for Henry had been trying to speak for several seconds. "I do not wish to wound your feelings, but another cause for poor Janet's state of mind has just occurred to me. Does she really wish to be your wife, or is she merely holding to her engagement from her wonderful sense of duty? Do not be angry with me—pray don't, now." He moved away, but she followed and laid her soft white hand tenderly on his shoulder. "We have all been pained to notice the coldness with which she has treated you: indeed, I fancied that you were conscious of it, and that you went down stairs with her on that last evening to have it fully explained."

She paused at last, but Wenlock could not answer her. There is something horribly convincing in hearing our own thoughts spoken by some one else. Was it possible that Janet no longer loved him? She had said she did, but the more he reflected on her refusal to become his wife, the more singular it seemed; and if she did not love him, what had changed her? Only one answer came: she loved some one else. Not Mr. Painson—it was absurd to hold such an idea; and yet Mr. Painson had plainly more of her confidence than he had.

He turned suddenly on Mrs. Webb. Wounded affection, jealousy, and anger at this last suggestion, overcame all remains of self-control: "After all, Mrs. Webb, I scarcely see why you sent for me. Janet is her own mistress, and if she chooses to go off to Rookstone with-

out consulting you, it is possibly because she does not value your opinion."

"Well, it is better, perhaps, that you see it in that way" (she gave him a pitying smile); "but the impression on my mind is that she has gone away to avoid you. However, that is of course no business of mine; only I must say this—I do not consider a girl who goes rushing about the country in this sudden, mysterious way a fit companion for my daughter, and I think if you ask any other mother you will get the same answer. Louy at present is perfectly docile and submissive, but there is no saying what this strong-minded, self-willed sort of example may teach her."

And Henry Wenlock, as he walked sorrowfully back to his lodgings, asked himself whether a strong-minded, self-willed wife would make him happy—whether, as some flaw or other must be accepted in every human being, a certain amount of silliness would not be preferable, united to a sweet and yielding nature. Remember, my dear Captain Wenlock, that sugar and water turn to vinegar as quickly as sound ale.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

It was a bitterly cold day. The trees in Rookstone Park were almost bare, and a few sickly yellow leaves which yet lingered were swept away by the keen north wind in a rapid whirling dance, till they fell giddy and lifeless on the crisp turf.

It was thorough winter, without the sparkling sunshine or bracing atmosphere that makes frost so endurable.

Mary Wolferston crouched closer and closer over the fire. She had recovered her usual health, but she looked listless and discontented. Her baby was a bonny, healthy child, her husband as tender as ever, and yet she felt restless. She seemed for ever wanting something not to be found at Rookstone.

"How glad I shall be when spring comes," she said to herself, "and we can leave this dull place! I wonder if

Richard will let me take baby to London? Oh, he must! I could not be parted from him. I wish I could think his father loved him."

The rosy under lip drooped and her whole face clouded over. Every time she looked at her infant or held it in her arms holy and pure feelings strove to be heard; and mingled with these was a more awful conviction—a sense rather felt than realized of a responsibility—for hitherto Mary had never called herself to account about anything.

She had not hinted this to her husband. She knew too well the sneer it would provoke. Richard had often told her that every man should take care of himself, and that so long as parents fed and clothed their children, and educated them in the way of book-learning, they did what was requisite; and formerly she had listened to this in docile acquiescence.

But she could not stifle this whisper, which taught her an entirely new creed respecting her duty to her child; and yet, although she listened to it, it seemed to make her daily more discontented.

"I believe I am getting morbid and silly," she said, "but there is no use in my trying to be wise. I always used to go to dear mamma for advice, and I cannot depend on myself. How I wish Richard would take just a little interest! but if I worry him I'm afraid he will care for baby even less than he does now." She checked herself in sudden alarm: she had discovered her husband's jealousy lest her motherly love should alter her affection for himself; and here she was already blaming him in thought—she who had resolved to make his will her law in all things. But this feeling of mental disquiet was becoming troublesome, and Mary's was a nature which always sought relief from a burden by laying it on some one else. A new idea had occurred to her, and her face brightened into its usual beauty. Just then her husband came in.

"You are not coming out with me, then?" he said. "Well, perhaps you are more comfortable here. I believe you are growing lazy, Mary."

"No, I'm not; but come and sit down too, darling, and I'll make a beautiful blaze. I am thinking of writing to Janet—that selfish Henry must spare her to me for a few days."

She was warming her husband's cold hand between her own, but he pulled it away roughly: "Janet! why, she was here quite lately, What can you want with Janet, Mary?"

He never called her Mary unless he was displeased with her. He had a store of tender petting epithets always ready to lavish on her.

She looked up at him half frightened, half vexed: "But she stayed such a short time: surely you don't mind her coming, Richard?"

"You have not answered my question." He spoke very coldly. "Why do you so much wish her to come to Rookstone?"

Mary hesitated, and then she felt prompted to speak openly: "Now I am a mother"—she saw a frown gathering, and she went on nervously—"there are so many things I want advice about. I don't tease you, darling, because I know you would not like it, and I dare say I am nervous and silly, but then Janet won't mind my silliness, and she will help me out of all my worries.

"Worries! what do you mean?"

"Never mind, darling: only say Janet may come and you shall never be worried."

She looked up at him in the sweet beseeching way she used to find irresistible, but Richard had turned from her, so that she could not see his face.

"Mary"—his voice sounded very stern—"I may as well tell you at once that I have no wish to see Janet here for some time to come. She—she displeased me extremely while she was here, and for the present, at any rate, she and I are better apart." He turned round and saw that his wife was crying. He went on angrily: "I don't understand you, Mary. You used to be happy and satisfied with everything. I was company enough for you, but now you seem always to be wanting something you have not got."

"Oh, Richard, it was only for baby's sake I wanted Janet."

"I wish now the child had never come!" he said impatiently. "I believe you care for nothing else in the world."

Before his shocked, terrified wife could answer he had left the room and was on his way up the avenue.

Coming down it at a helter-skelter pace, quite unlike his usual elegant lounge, was Mr. François Leroux. He nearly ran against his master. "Ah, monsieur, one thousand pardons, but you are on the right road. Do you know who is going to arrive at the park—will be arrived there if we do not hasten ourselves?"

"What do you mean?"

Leroux knew by his master's voice that he was not in a humor to guess riddles. "It is that young lady of whom you said to me that she was not to return to Rookstone—madame's sister, Miss Wolferston."

Richard muttered something to himself: then he said aloud, "When did you see her?"

"Just now, monsieur. I was in the toll-house, but she did not see me, and as soon as she had passed I jumped over the first gate I came to in the lane, and kept the hedge between me and her till I had left her behind: then I ran as fast as I could to tell you, monsieur."

Richard Wolferston's face was not pleasant to look at. He had certainly said to Leroux that Miss Wolferston had offended him, and that she would not return to Rookstone, and yet he felt annoyed that the man should have remembered this, and that he should have interfered now.

"You can leave me alone," he said, sullenly. "I am going to meet Miss Wolferston."

The Frenchman stood looking after him. "These English are uncivilized," and he shrugged his shoulders. "I spy out, I intrigue, I take the risk of injury to my health by a so quick run as that, and then Mr. Wolferston never say, 'Thank you, Leroux.' It is strange: I have notice it before. Why is he all at

once so angry, and in such hurry, when he hear the name of the sister of madame? What is it, this dispute they have when she go away so suddenly? Thou art growing stupid, François my friend, in this beef-eating England, or thou wouldst not ask thyself a question twice: it would be something to improve this dull Rookstone if I could find it had a secret. *Voyons!* there is nothing like a little quiet observation."

CHAPTER XL.
JANET'S PROMISE.

RICHARD WOLFERSTON met his sister-in-law just outside the park gates. He placed himself in her way, but he did not offer to shake hands with her: "What do you want? You cannot see your sister."

"I only want to see you," said Janet, quietly. "Take me anywhere you like, so that we may be safe from interruption, but I must say a few words to you, Richard."

He hesitated. She had defied his prohibition by coming there at all; and yet, thinking of women as he did, he believed it was better to let her have her say out than to refuse to listen to her. "They are all alike for obstinacy," he said to himself: "she will never leave me in peace if I don't listen to her."

He led the way outside the park till he came to a small side gate. He opened it for Janet to pass through, and then walked on till they reached an opening among the beech trees where seven grassed rides met. Then he stopped and looked at Janet: "Well, what do you wish to say?"

"I have been thinking very much about you," she said. "I do not wish to defend my own conduct the last time I saw you; but I feel sure now, Richard, that you have no right to be master of Rookstone."

She spoke slowly and calmly, but he broke in with anger: "If you have only come to repeat this wild nonsense, I cannot listen to you."

"You will listen a little longer. I do

not ask you to give up Rookstone"—he laughed—"or to do anything which might convict you in the eyes of the world. I believe you have some right to this property, but that right cannot justify you in holding it by means of a fraud."

"I cannot listen to these accusations: if you have nothing else to say we had better separate."

She looked at him steadily, and he returned her gaze. "Richard, if you had nothing to conceal, would you have had me watched when I was last at Rookstone?—for you would not have come into the study so opportunely as you did if you had not been told I was there: besides, I know that my very coming to-day has been watched and reported to you." She laid her hand on his arm, for he turned away: "You are Mary's husband: try to believe that I am not moved by angry feelings toward you, but by an irresistible longing to save you much unhappiness. Oh, Richard, do confess this fraud!"

"Confess!" He stamped his foot angrily, and the sneer on his face must have deterred Janet from further speech if she had not been resolved on saying all she had come there to say. "Janet, you are surely mad: you know how I detest all cant and hypocrisy. Speak the truth, and say you want me to give up Rookstone to Christy, and to gain your point you have concocted this precious idea of a fraud. I don't know why I condescend to argue with you at all. Come before a magistrate, if you choose, and hear me swear, as I promise you I will swear, that there is no forgery in the signatures to your father's will—that is what you mean by a fraud, I imagine—but I am not going to listen to such crazy stuff as this. I don't know why I have listened at all. If you were not Mary's sister, I should feel strongly inclined to have you punished for bringing a false charge against me."

For a moment Janet stood doubtful. This indignant, open denial was exactly that of an innocent man. "I wish, I could believe you," she said, sorrowfully, "but I can't. I have tried, but

against this conviction, but it will not leave me. I make no terms for Christy: if you only acknowledge what you have done, you will be guided to act rightly toward him. Oh, Richard, listen only one moment. Try and believe it is for you own sake and Mary's, and your child's, that I have come here to-day." She spoke with such passionate earnestness that he was obliged to stand there till she had ended. "She fancied his lips trembled slightly. "I have heard that ill-gotten goods never prosper," she said; "and if you carry this secret with you all your life, it may be that others will suffer for your crime. Besides, what peace of mind can you have? How can you enjoy life at all? Already I see a change in you, and Mary will see it soon, perhaps; and how will it be if she finds out what you have done?"

"You mean to tell her all this rhodomontade of yours, do you?" He had roused at last from the spell Janet's fervor had exercised. "Then I shall know how to deal with you. You are plainly out of your mind on this point; and as I do not choose my wife to be frightened or annoyed, I shall take such measures as will prevent you from poisoning her mind by your folly. You must be parted. It is entirely your fault. When I married your sister, I had no intention of separating her from her family, but you leave me no choice: I won't have Mary troubled. I entirely forbid you to come to Rookstone again."

He led the way to the gate.

Just as they reached it, Janet spoke. "I believe you will yet see things differently," she said. "What I came to tell you to-day was that I only want you to make this acknowledgment to myself and Mr. Painson. It is no question of giving up Rookstone during your lifetime to Christy." He answered by opening the gate for her. "You need not even own it to Mary," she said, pleadingly. "We would keep your secret."

"I have no answer to make to such folly."

He did not look angry now. He seemed weary of the discussion, and

anxious to end it, and Janet was obliged to pass out.

She heard him lock the door as soon as he had closed it, and then she took her way back to the station again.

She had succeeded in seeing Richard sooner than she had hoped. She had feared that it might be difficult to find him alone; and as she did not wish her presence known in the village, had decided on taking up her abode with Kitty Robbins if she were refused admittance at the house itself. At the cottage she thought she could watch for an opportunity of finding Richard alone in the park. She had communicated to Mr. Painson her determination to make an appeal to her brother-in-law, and he had combated this mode of proceeding as romantic, although he was obliged to own that the only way of dealing with Richard Wolferston would be by an open statement on Janet's part of the suspicions she entertained.

"I do not say it will do any good," he had added, "but at any rate it will relieve your mind."

And now she had succeeded in seeing Richard sooner than she had hoped for, and yet she had done nothing. It did not seem as if she had said half she meant to say, and she knew that Richard would not listen to her again. Still, as she went back along the well-known road, she felt hopeful—hopeful as we all feel sometimes when we know no reason for our hope. No word that Richard had spoken was calculated to cheer her, and yet her heart felt lighter than it had felt for months.

It might have been that her conscience was relieved from the weight that had burdened it. She had done what she could—all that, according to Mr. Painson, it was possible for her to do: this secret, the barrier which so short a while ago had seemed insurmountable between herself and Henry Wenlock, had dwindled away into a creation of her own imagination. A soft blush rose on her cheeks and her deep blue eyes grew liquid as she dwelt in thought on her next interview with her lover.



PART VII.

CHAPTER XL.—*Continued.*

HOW short the way back to the station seemed! how exquisite the golden brown of the few remaining oak leaves! how brilliant the scarlet of the holly berries as they peeped from the glossy, glistening hedge! The day was as cold and ungenial as it had been when she started, the sky wore just the same leaden, uniform tint, and yet Janet walked on with the elastic, springy tread of keen enjoyment.

She had left some luggage in the parcels office. As she went to reclaim it, a man who was standing at the door turned hurriedly away. He seemed to be trying to escape notice, and Janet looked after him.

It was the same man who had followed her on her way from the toll-house—Richard's French servant. Her first impulse was to avoid him, and then a thought struck her. Why should she not take this opportunity of communicating with Mary? It was plain, from what Richard had said, that any letter she addressed in future to her sister would be intercepted; and although she felt that, with the assurance she had of her husband's guilt, she and Mary could no longer meet without a feeling of restraint on her side, still her heart yearned toward her sister—so young, so inexperienced, and so entirely given up to the guidance of a man who could not lead her rightly; for, as Janet felt, such a sin as Richard's must drag the doer of it downward—must, so long as it remained unacknowledged, unatoned for, choke every striving for good, and wither and canker the germ of even natural affections.

It was sad to think of Mary believing herself forgotten—Mary, whom her

mother had solemnly charged her to watch over and protect. Ah, that charge had perhaps been prophetic. When she remembered the sneering, scoffing look that seemed now habitual to Richard, she wondered whether he would not at last doubt his wife, and treat her with coldness and suspicion. She must give Mary the assurance that the estrangement on her part was unwilling.

She was soon beside Leroux.

For a moment the man's ready-wittedness forsook him: he looked ashamed and startled.

"Good-morning!" Janet spoke so simply and naturally that his self-possession came back. "If I give you a note for my sister, Mrs. Wolferston, can you undertake to deliver it to her?"

She made no excuse for her sudden appearance, no allusion to his master. Leroux admired her courage, although he thought she might have taken the trouble to make things "more vraisemblable: she is so English, this young lady;" and he answered civilly, "Certainly, Mees Wolferston, I will give the note to madame. Can I do anything else?"

"Nothing, thank you."

She tore off the back of a letter and wrote:

"DEAREST MARY: Do not be surprised at not hearing from me: your husband does not wish me to write or go to you. You can show him this note if you choose: I have no wish to do anything unknown to him. May God bless you, my darling sister! Remember, if at any time you really want my help or counsel, no one shall keep me from you: I promise this.

"Your truly loving JANET."

She had no envelope, no means of fastening her note securely; but she knew that Leroux must be aware of all that she had written: she risked nothing in giving it to him.

He took it from her without the slightest indication of surprise or secret understanding: he was far too polite to make any woman so pretty and so young as Miss Wolferston uncomfortable for a moment when thus brought face to face, although he had not scrupled to play spy on her movements ever since he had first seen her from the toll-house.

Janet lay back in the railway carriage, exhausted but happy. She repeated to herself the promise she had made to her sister. It was possible that Mary might never require its fulfillment. Janet hoped earnestly that this would be so, that Richard's repentance might come before she expected it, and that he and his wife would begin life over again in a new and better way. And then her thoughts traveled back to Henry Wenlock, and Mary and her own promise to her were forgotten in happier anticipations than she had known since the night of her father's death.

CHAPTER XLI.

FRANÇOIS LEROUX SHARPENS HIS WITS.

MONSIEUR LEROUX left the station as soon as the train was in motion, and when he found himself fairly alone in the road he took Janet's note out of the pocket-book in which he had carefully placed it, and read it through.

The first reading seemed unsatisfactory, and he went through it again: then he looked at the back, and finally folded it up, shrugging his shoulders and raising his eyebrows till his forehead looked like the flutings on a picture-frame. "It is inconceivable," he said. "There is here only what I knew before—not one word about secret or dispute; and there must be a secret, and there has been a quarrel also, or monsieur would not take so much trouble to hinder Mees Janet from seeing madame. I felt so glad to get the

billet, and now it is no use to me. Where is the point at which I must begin to find this secret? It gives me fresh energy, fresh life, to have the idea of discovering something: besides, it is useful to me. In this quiet country-life I rust—I become as a turnip or a watermelon for intelligence. When I return to the capital the police will no longer benefit by my services—I shall have become too stupid to be useful: allons, François, my friend, sharpen thy wits. It is always best to begin at the beginning: when didst thou first smell out this idea?"

He walked on slowly, thinking, but till he reached the avenue he could not in any way recall when his first dim suspicions had awakened. He settled that they had come by degrees, caused chiefly by the singular change in his master. "He was never gay," he said, "but he was willing to trust all to me: now he is for ever displeased with somebody, and he grows more and more stern and silent. Even when madame is with him I do not think he laughs or takes any enjoyment from his life: it is strange, too, when he has a son to succeed him. If there is a secret, madame does not know—I am sure of it: she could not be so happy and careless when she plays with her bebbby. Still, she does not seem always so happy, but that is perhaps because her husband is so grave and dull."

He went on in silence, till something in one of the tree-trunks reminded him of his walk there with Thompson. She had pointed out its peculiar growth to him.

"Ah," he said, "if that civil young person had come with the sister of madame, I would have had the secret from her quick as I take the cork from a bottle, for Madame Thompson knows it, of course, if Mees Janet knows it, and mees must know it, or monsieur would not exile her from madame—"

He stopped suddenly: a flash of light had shot into his brain, and shown him what he was seeking. He thought all over again now, and link by link his scattered memories arranged them-

selves to point all in one direction—the study. He had not seen the light burning there on the night of Janet's discovery, but he had not then set himself to trace out the secret he now believed to exist. He had not been expressly set to watch Janet on that night. He had been told carelessly by his master to keep a good lookout in the evening, and if the old woman Robbins came prowling about, to send her back to her cottage. Mr. Wolferston had said no more, but the quick-witted Frenchman had noticed the coldness of his manner toward Janet, and had jumped at the conclusion that his master wanted to prevent Kitty from getting speech of her. He watched diligently through the evening: once the rustling among the bushes had nearly betrayed the old woman's presence, but still he had found nothing to report to his master. When Richard returned home he found his faithful spy in the hall, where he had taken refuge from the rain. Leroux said he had seen nothing of Mrs. Robbins. "The trees rustled once," he said, "under the study window, and I looked about, but there was no one."

And then his master had released him from his post, and as soon as Leroux was safe indoors, Richard hastened round the corner of the building and saw Janet's telltale candle through the study window. But Leroux knew nothing of this: the circumstance that had startled him when he thought of his walk with Thompson was the remembrance of Mrs. Wolferston's deathlike swoon. He had joined in the search for her: he had looked all over the saloon a very short time before he was called to help in bearing her up stairs. Where had she come from in that fainting condition? He had not left the entrance hall, so she could not have gone in that way: he was certain she was not in either of the rooms at each end of the saloon—he had looked in them: she must then have been in the study. Why was that door always kept locked? The housekeeper said it was because of deeds and papers which Mr. Wolferston's absence from home

had prevented him from sorting and arranging, and Leroux had accepted this reason as valid. He smiled at his own credulity now.

"We sing songs like this to children," he said. "It has a Blue Beard's room, then, this Rookstone, has it? and it is possible that Mees Janet has also had a peep in the terrible study, and that is why she is sent away without ceremony. Aha! monsieur, my master, I mean you no harm, but you make life dull and unpleasant at Rookstone, and I have the right to take a little revenge to amuse myself. Yes, it is the study: my master has not been joyful or pleasant to me ever since the poor lady, his mother-in-law, went away; and I do not think he has been in that room since, except the night before Mees Janet is departed."

Still, this idea was not worth much: he might be able to find his way into this Blue Beard's chamber, but what was he to look for when he got there? He was clever enough to know that his suspicions must be more definite before he could act upon them. He had reached the house by this time. He wanted to find Mrs. Wolferston alone, and he went into the saloon on the pretence of seeing to the huge fires which were blazing in the grates at each end of it.

Mary was still sitting near one of the fires. She looked sad, but less discontented than before.

Leroux went up to her, and then, looking round with an air of great mystery, he informed her that Miss Wolferston had given him that note for madame, and had charged him to deliver it to her when she was alone.

"Miss Wolferston! Where did you see her? Does Mr. Wolferston know she is here?"

Leroux bowed his head gravely: "Mees Wolferston is not here now, madame—she have gone back to London: I do not think monsieur will like madame to be inform of her sister's visit. Madame may trust me—I can be silent." He laid his hand on his heart in an impressive manner and went away.

Mary read the note, and the longing to see her sister grew stronger. The discussion with her husband about Janet had taken away any surprise she might have felt at this mode of communication, but it deepened the pain. She knew Richard's resolutions and dislikes were unchangeable.

There was comfort in Janet's promise, and yet what did it amount to? So long as Richard loved her she could never really want help or counsel so urgently as to justify her in sending for her sister. She thought she would show Richard the note, and then she remembered what he had said before he left her. It would only make matters worse between him and Janet if she betrayed any knowledge of her presence at Rookstone. It would make a fresh dispute with Richard. "No, I cannot vex him again," she thought. While she had been sitting there she had been taking herself soundly to task about Richard's jealousy of his baby: it was all her fault—she knew it was: she loved him as dearly as ever, but she had given up many little ways, which he doubtless missed, so as to spend more of her time with her child. While she was dressing for dinner, Richard came into her room: he asked her to send away her maid. "My own darling," he said, as soon as they were alone—and his voice had the strange fascination, a sweetness full of subdued power, which made him so irresistible—"I was cruel to you just now. When I think how much more I have done to show my love for you than most men have, it is wonderful that I can cloud the only happiness I have ever known." She looked up at him lovingly, too much moved to weigh his words, and he went on: "I told you once, my darling, that you were the only being who had ever understood me or done me justice. I can say more than this now: it is only when I am actually with you that I know a moment's peace or happiness. You are all I have: can you wonder if I am jealous of every minute you rob from me?"

Never since their marriage had he

spoken to her with this strange frankness—a frankness which became almost vehement when he spoke of his love for her. It was delicious to the young wife to listen to this assurance of the affection she feared to have alienated, and yet a secret sense of dread mingled with her joy. "But, Richard, darling, it is dreadful that you are never happy or at peace unless we are together. Think how young people die sometimes, and if I were to be taken away from you—"

He started as if some one had given him a blow, and a look of terror, and then of defiance, came into his face. Clapping his wife closely to his heart, he spoke in the hard, stern voice that had lately become so habitual: "You must never say that again: the thought comes too often as it is, and it makes half my misery. I will not contemplate it—I will not believe such a thing possible. Hush, darling!" She tried to interrupt him, and he went on more gently: "I know all you want to say, and when I am able to think such an idea possible—and there are times when it masters even me—I wonder how I can ever leave your side for an instant, ever waste one fraction of the happiness that may be so short. There! I did not want to bring tears." He stooped and kissed them fondly from her eyes. "Ring for your maid, and I give you five minutes only before you join me in the saloon, and then you shall spend the evening in chasing all these shapeless terrors from my head."

Again he kissed her, and Mary, bewildered between her passionate delight and the vague sense of underlying fear, was so restless under her maid's hands that even the adroit French girl was at last obliged to remonstrate.

CHAPTER XLII.

SETTLED.

HENRY WENLOCK went back to his office from Mrs. Webb's, but he found his work intolerable. He had always detested writing, and now he asked himself how he could have been so

foolish as to give up a profession he liked for mere office drudgery. If Janet would neither marry him nor give him her confidence, he had better have remained in the army.

He did not believe in Mrs. Webb's fears for Janet's sanity, but he thought it most unbecoming that his promised wife should fly about the country in this way, without giving any previous warning of her intentions. As the afternoon wore on this thought grew troublesome, and he began to wonder at the supineness with which he had taken it for granted that Janet was really at Rookstone. He could not remain in doubt any longer, and left the office hurriedly.

At the station he found there would be no train for Rookstone for an hour, but that there was one expected from Rookstone almost directly.

While he stood waiting it came up, and Janet got out of one of the carriages.

She started when she saw him, and then such a happy, glad look beamed out of her eyes that Henry's anger melted for an instant. But he kept down the relenting that wanted to make peace at once. While still anxious he had brought himself to attribute all Mrs. Webb's warnings to spitefulness—it might be that Janet had gone away to avoid her cousin's unkindness—but now that he saw her safe in London again on the same day as that on which she had started for Rookstone, he began to think she must indeed be very eccentric—more eccentric than he could have thought possible; and until she had fully explained her conduct it behooved him to maintain a dignified reserve.

"Are you going back to Vincent Square?" he said, stiffly. He did not ask permission to accompany her. He had made up his mind not to quit sight of Janet till she was safely bestowed somewhere: he wished heartily he had the right to take her to his own home.

"Yes;" but she looked surprised at his question.

The cab drove up and Janet got in,

and then, as soon as Henry Wenlock had followed her, she looked at her lover.

There was an archness mingled with the happiness that beamed out of her eyes that in his present mood was, to say the least, disconcerting; but Janet was too full of joy at the delight of seeing him to be chilled by his manner. She felt years younger in the possession of that exquisite bliss which for the time will overcome the reserve of even the most timid among us—consciousness of our own power to make another happy.

"I have seen Mrs. Webb to-day," Wenlock said, gravely. "Are you not terribly fatigued, Janet?" His last words had grown severe, for no shade of regret or annoyance showed in those blue eyes raised so lovingly to his.

Janet did not look confused: she laughed. "I am too happy to feel tired yet." Then, seeing his unsympathizing expression, she stole her hand gently through his arm: "You are vexed with me, and I cannot wonder. I ought to have told you I was going to Rookstone, but I thought I should perhaps be at home again before you came to Vincent Square."

"And that I need know nothing about it." He spoke more stiffly, and though the little hand still lay on his arm, it stayed there of its own free will.

A depth of tenderness swam into her eyes: "No, indeed, my own. I should have told you all I am going to tell you now, all I can tell you, for the discussion between myself and Richard is of too private a nature to repeat." Henry's face darkened again, but she went on: "I met him on my way to Rookstone. He forbade me to see Mary: he wishes to keep us apart for the present. I may as well tell you," she added (she saw he was not satisfied), "that Richard and I quarreled the last time I went to Rookstone, and we are not likely to be friends again."

"Then why did you go down there to-day?"

"I wanted to see him, and I should

have been glad to see Mary too, but as he does not wish it, of course we must be strangers for the present."

"What did you quarrel about?"

Janet had been dreading this question, and yet she was almost glad to hear it, for she knew Henry would have asked it sooner or later, and it seemed to her as if her fate hung on the way in which he might receive her answer.

"That was what I meant just now by saying that our discussion must remain private—"

"Even from me?" He drew himself away from her and sat upright, looking so proud and stubborn that for a moment she felt hopeless—felt as if all her life's happiness was going to be sacrificed, after all, to this secret.

She gazed at him with such a timid softness, such a yearning tenderness, that as he looked down into her face at her next words he felt as if he must take her to his heart and trust her for ever.

"Henry, I know all you are feeling, but you cannot know how I have longed to say all this to you before, or how bitter it is to me to keep anything from you; and indeed, while I thought that this secret might prove any cause of vexation between us, I was so determined that your happiness should not be affected by it that—that—I do not think I could ever have become your wife while a fear of this lasted; but I hope it is over. The matter itself is now so wholly bound up in Richard and Mary that I cannot see what interest it could have for you in its present state, even if I were free to speak of it; and I am not."

So far Henry had listened eagerly, every moment with growing interest; but now he suddenly clasped Janet's hand in both his and broke in abruptly: "Then you will be my wife now, Janet? If I have understood you rightly, this was the bar to our marriage. My darling, my darling, why did you not trust me sooner? why did you not let me stand between you and all these vexations?"

In his transport at this unexpected

prospect of happiness he could not listen to her repetitions that she was still as much bound as ever to keep the secret from him. He forgot all his resentful doubts about Mr. Painson and the confidence she reposed in him, and by the time they reached Vincent Square he was pressing her eagerly to fix the wedding-day.

Janet told him that he was unreasonable, but she promised at last to give him an answer to-morrow evening, when he came to Mrs. Webb's.

As the cab stopped a new idea occurred to him: "Don't you think you might go and stay with Mrs. Dawson until we are married? I feel as if you would be happier there."

Janet thought for a few minutes: "In some ways, yes; but Aunt Dawson is away from home till the end of the Christmas holidays, and then I could not leave Christy alone in Vincent Square, and the walk to school would be much too far for the child, at this time of year, from Aunt Dawson's. No"—she smiled up at him—"I know why you wish for this, darling; but we must make the best of Mrs. Webb: I believe one sees the worst of her, poor woman!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

AN ACCIDENT.

IT was a singularly early spring: the leaf-buds on the trees swelled rapidly, promising a speedy unfolding. Little more than two months had gone by since Janet's last visit to Rookstone, and yet the year looked, judging by outward signs, much farther on its way than the last week of March. Spring flowers, however, were still shy and backward: here and there a wild strawberry blossom starred the hedge-bank, but the village children out on holiday rambles had to search closely for primroses for their Easter posies.

Richard Wolferston was driving his wife home across the park, just within the gates they met the nurse carrying the child in her arms—a healthy, lively boy, nearly six months old now. He

held out his arms and crowed with delight as the carriage stopped beside him.

"Oh, you darling!" Mary exclaimed: "give him to me, nurse. Oh, Richard," for her husband remonstrated, "you must let me have him just a little minute. Baby would like a ride, wouldn't he, the darling? Look, I have him quite firmly in my lap. You can go home, nurse—I mean to keep him."

Her husband looked vexed, but her bright face made him ashamed of thwarting her: "Well, if you let him fall, don't say it was my fault." He touched the horses lightly with his whip, and they dashed rapidly along the avenue. "Hold him fast," he said, and turned into a grassed road that led to the house by a nearer way.

Mary was laughing at some baby exploit, and her husband looked fondly down on her sunny face. Just then the horses started, plunged and reared madly, the carriage jerked violently on one side, and Mary was thrown out, with her child clasped in her arms.

Almost as she fell, Richard sprang down, and was at the ponies' heads before they could move forward. He looked round for his wife, but he dared not leave the struggling, terrified horses. Mary was not stunned. In a minute or two she had raised herself, and was sitting up on the grass with her child in her arms. He looked round for help, and then he saw the cause of the mischief.

An old woman with her apron full of fagot-wood stood trembling in the path of the terrified horses. It was Kitty Robbins, but she looked so pale and scared that for the moment Richard had not recognized her.

"A curse on you!" he said fiercely: "how dare you come prowling here?"

The words changed Kitty's fear into fury. She knew that Mary lay there on the turf beside the carriage, she knew, too, that the angry squire could not leave the still frightened, struggling horses, but she could not find room just then for any thought but the wrath he had raised: "Dare! Is it *you* who dare

I, Richard Wolferston? A man should be sure he be on his own land afore he warns others off it: stolen goods never thrives, and ye may find the curse come back to 'ee and what owns 'ee."

Then she moved slowly round to the side of the carriage. Mary was still sitting with her child in her lap when Kitty reached her: the little creature had fallen on its head, and it lay senseless, although otherwise it showed no mark of injury.

Richard dared not leave the horses' heads, though he saw what had happened. "Could you manage to get in again?" he said to Mary, "and then I will lead the horses home."

"Oh no, I could not. Go home as fast as you can, and come back to us."

It seemed the only thing to be done, and as the horses were quieter since Kitty had removed out of their sight, Richard sprang into the carriage again and drove rapidly away.

Mary's eyes were fixed in such intense agony on her child that she had forgotten Kitty's presence till she spoke. "Let me take he," the old woman said: "maybe I'll bring he to."

"No, no, I'll not part from him," and Mary clasped the unconscious child still closer. The pressure roused him: he half opened his eyes, and began to cry.

"Him'll do now," said Kitty; "him dwoant ail naught."

Mary kissed him, and soothed and at last quieted the sobbing child.

"'Ee'd better let I take he"—Kitty held out her arms—"and then 'ee can be moving, Muss Mary: 'ee'd be best at whoam now, I'm thinkin'."

But Mary had heard Kitty's previous words, and she drew back with evident repugnance: "No, Kitty, I could not let you touch my child after what you said just now. You are very wicked to speak in such a manner to Mr. Wolferston: I believe he could have you punished."

"Let he try!" The evil light flamed up again in the old woman's eyes. "There beant no law agin telling truth, Muss Mary; and if ye belieye yon hus-

band o' yourn owns the park by lawful right, ye believe what's not true."

Something in the words, but more in the solemn manner of the speaker, went straight to Mary's conviction. She was still sitting on the turf, and it was well that she was so sitting, for her limbs seemed to grow weak suddenly and all her powers of consciousness to become dim.

Kitty retired out of sight among the trees. "An old chattering fool I be," she said to herself: "it wur one thing to say it to he, but what call had I to frighten she?"

Richard was soon back again, followed by Leroux, the nurse and some other servants, and amid a sort of chorus of sympathy and wonder Mary and the baby were conveyed to Rookstone.

Leroux's sharp eyes had spied Kitty lurking among the leafless trees. He had heard his master say she had caused the mischief, and he lingered behind to speak to her. "Good-evening, Madame Robbins," he said, advancing toward her: "it is a fine mischief this which have happened."

"Your master should keep to beaten tracks then. What call had he to leave the drive to come across this jolting, uneven road, driving like mad as him do?"

Leroux looked at her curiously, and divers little remembrances came back: "It appears, madame, you not like very much Mr. Wolferston?"

"No, I dwoant!" She laughed in a short, hard way, and then she looked full in the Frenchman's inquisitive face.

"For what reason do you not like him, madame?" said the Frenchman, politely.

"For reasons o' mine, and as they bees mine, I mean to keep 'em and not give 'em to 'ee. What call ha' you to come askin' questions about the master whose bread ye live on? Go along wi' ye, ye sneak! trying to creep up my sleeve with your wriggling foreign ways—go along, I say."

She stood resolutely pointing toward Rookstone, and Leroux, taken rather aback by the quickness with which she

had read his purpose, turned in the direction she indicated.

"She is a vitch," he said: "she must be one; and yet I am perfectly sure she knows about the secret of my master and Mees Janet. I have been thinking this long time to speak to her, but it is useless: she is a too spiteful old woman. All I can do now is to see Madame Thompson and find if she know anything."

CHAPTER XLIV.

JANET'S VISITOR.

It was, as has been said, the end of March, and the time fixed for Janet's marriage was drawing near.

At first, Mrs. Webb had thrown decided obstacles in its way—obstacles suggested so skillfully that they had appeared even to Janet insuperable—and at last, when everything had seemed propitious, little Christy fell ill with measles. He was so very ill that Janet would not trust his nursing to any care but her own, and spite of all her tender devotedness weeks passed before the child could safely leave his sick room.

But all this was happily at an end. The marriage was at last fixed definitely to take place in a month, and Janet was sitting now with her little brother chatting over plans for the future: "You see you will be quite strong before we come back, darling, and then we shall all be so happy together."

Christy looked at her fretfully. His likeness to Mary was very striking since his illness. "Why can't I go with you too?" he said. "I don't want to go to the seaside alone with Thompson: she's not amusing, and she doesn't know the name of anything. I don't like to be with stupid people."

Janet laughed. She was so happy and bright, no wonder Christy clung to her companionship. "You are growing such a wise little man," she said; "but now that you can read, Christy, you can answer some of your questions yourself. I will give you some nice seaside books to take to Hastings with you, dear."

He did not look content, but before he could answer a servant came in and asked if Miss Wolferston could speak to Thompson for a few minutes. "Yes, tell her to come up stairs."

"Then I shall go," said Christy: "if I'm to be shut up with Thompson for a whole fortnight, I shall have enough of her."

"Oh, Christy!" so tenderly spoken that, already ashamed of his petulance, he went back to his sister with a half-strangling kiss and a whispered "I'm sorry," and then ran away to hide the tears his growing manhood despised.

Janet leant back in her chair musing, her lips parted a little and her eyes full of soft sweet thoughts. There were no conflicting doubts to furrow her brow or to tighten the relaxed curve of the rosy mouth. She was very, very happy.

It had been painful to delay Henry's happiness for the sake of Christy, and yet it had been a clear duty: even her lover had consented cheerfully that she should fulfill her mother's part toward her little brother. How good Henry had been through all! how unselfish! and now she was to spend all her life in trying to make him happy.

"Not that he wants it," she said softly to herself. "He is too good not to be happy, and any woman he loved must have given him her whole heart."

There was a tap at the door, and Thompson came in. Janet had expected her for some days past. She had not gone to service again when finally dismissed from Vincent Square. She had joined a friend who had set up a small dressmaking and millinery establishment in Pimlico, and Miss Wolferston had promised to entrust her with some of the wedding outfit. Therefore she felt much surprised to see a serious look of disquiet in poor Thompson's inexpressive eyes, instead of the smiling eagerness with which she had received the news of the approaching marriage. Janet took no notice, however. She unfolded a large parcel which lay on the sofa, and asked Thompson's opinion of some of the dresses she had been buying.

Thompson looked at them with a sort of resigned patience: "Very nice, very pretty indeed, Miss Wolferston—elegant, I may say, and, above all, what your poor dear mamma would have chosen." Here she heaved a deep sigh. "You must excuse me, miss, but I've been thinking so much of her since yesterday that I'm only in poor spirits."

Janet was silent. She thought, with Thompson, that five months—for it would be scarcely a longer period—was scant time between her mother's death and her own marriage; but she knew what her mother's wishes would have been, and she felt there was no real want of affection in consenting to marry Henry.

"It's best to tell you at once, ma'am, for you'll hear it soon enough; but it does seem so sad to have happened just now."

"What has happened?" Janet's heart beat quicker, for she saw that Thompson had really something to communicate.

"Well, ma'am, Mrs. Wolferston's lost her baby. It was upset out of a carriage, it seems, and in the evening it had a fit and died. Poor lamb!"

"Oh how dreadful! But how did you hear this? Are you sure, Thompson?"

"Sure and certain, ma'am. I was minding the show-room yesterday, and who should walk in but the French gentleman from Rookstone, Mr. Leroux! and he told me all about that and other things too. Oh dear! oh dear, Miss Wolferston!" Thompson broke down into a sort of pitiful cry. "I acted for the best—I really did; but what with his way of asking questions and that, I couldn't sleep all night, and the only thing seemed to be to come and tell you all about it."

Janet was so absorbed in sorrow for her sister's trial that she had not taken in the sense of Thompson's words. "Do you know how my sister is, or when this happened?"

"About a week ago, I fancy, ma'am, and I think Mr. Leroux said poor Miss Mary had kept her room ever since; but really, ma'am, what came after—

ward frightened me so that at first I nearly forgot all about the dear babe. I must tell you, if you please, ma'am."

Janet looked up surprised. She thought it was some private trouble of Thompson's to which she was asked to listen, and she wondered she should choose such a moment for communicating it.

But Thompson was too much interested in what she had to tell to heed the expression of her listener's face: "First of all, Mr. Leroux began by asking me if I remembered the last evening your poor dear mamma and I was at Rookstone, and of course I did. It wasn't likely I should ever forget such a fright as I got at seeing her lying on that blue couch as white as death; and then he looks at me in a sort of strange, clever kind of way, and asks me if I had any idea where Mrs. Wolferston had been all the evening. Now, here's where I was foolish, ma'am; and, oh dear! oh dear! I hope I haven't done harm. But he led me on, sympathizing with me for losing her, and my being thrown out of such a good situation, and talking of his own pleasure again at seeing me; for he said it was the first holiday he'd asked for for months, but he felt such a strange longing to see me. And so, ma'am, I asked him to have a cup of tea; and you know there's something sociable in tea-drinking. It leads you on as it were, and little by little, I hardly know how, he got out of me all I knew about that study at Rookstone, and the papers your poor dear mamma found in the davenport, and—"

An exclamation escaped from Janet's lips, a sort of anguished cry. This treasured secret—which she had fancied laid at rest till repentance should quicken in Richard Wolferston—known to a man like Leroux, over whose silence she could exercise no power!

"But how do you know anything about the study or papers, Thompson?" She tried to look indifferent, but the woman shook her head:

"Dear me, Miss Wolferston, you forget I never left your poor dear mamma in her illness when you were not

with her; and often when she lay in those long dozing fits she told quite enough to make me guess where she had fainted and why, even if I hadn't felt certain of it before; because, Miss Wolferston, where could your poor dear mamma have been that afternoon if she weren't in the study? I was out, but Leroux and all the rest had hunted everywhere—from top to bottom of the house; and as to being out of doors, which the squire pretended to think, why her bonnet was in her room, and your dear mamma was not the lady—no indeed, Miss Wolferston—to run about in the evening with nothing on; but, ma'am, if you ask any of the Rookstone people, you'll find they're all in the same story: they all think as Mr. Richard came by his rights in an unfair, underhand way. I don't say they know anything, but they all think poor dear little Master Christy's been ill used."

Janet had had time to re-collect herself: "I am very sorry you repeated anything you may have overheard, Thompson; and I must think you were very wrong to do it. If this man comes to you again, I hope you will refuse to speak on the subject at all."

"You may be sure of that, ma'am. I wouldn't have named it again to any one—not to you even—only I thought somehow it might work round, and get a lot more made of it, and I'd rather you should hear what really did take place."

She thought it more prudent to suppress the opinions she had volunteered to Leroux on the subject of his master; and after she had been again warned by Janet never to mention the subject to any one, Thompson departed from Vincent Square lighter-hearted than she had come there.

CHAPTER XLV.

MARY'S APPEAL.

MARY's child lay out of sight under the great gray stone in Rookstone churchyard—gone away just when the spring flowers, of which he had seemed

to her a type, were every day revealing their presence. "Her bird" she had called him, and now, as every morning the songs came in fuller, richer music from the trees, they waked sadder echoes in the bereaved mother's heart.

It was the day after the funeral, and still Mary sat in her room, heavy-eyed and listless, as if her life had no further purpose in it. Richard tried to comfort her, but for the first time she was indifferent to his tenderness: she wanted to be left alone—she said she could not talk yet. And he had left her much to herself during all these days of sorrow. He hated grief: it was so natural to find sunshine in his wife's lovely face that it disturbed and irritated him to see it disfigured by sorrow. He had grieved for the loss of his boy, but more from pride and sympathy for Mary than because he had as yet conceived a strong love for the child himself. But he thought she had sorrowed long enough: she ought to rouse herself now; and he went indoors to seek her. Mary took no notice of his approach: even when he took her hand in his she did not look at him.

"Come, Mary, it will do you good to take a turn with me in this bright sunshine: you have been indoors long enough."

"I cannot, indeed I cannot: I shrink away from the brightness. Ah, Richard, if you had loved baby you would not want me to be happy again."

He soothed her, and then, finding she still remained stubborn in her grief, he spoke more firmly. He told her she would injure her health, and that she ought to consider that she belonged to him as well as to her child.

"Richard," she said abruptly, almost as if she had not heard his words, "you surely will let Janet come to me now? You must." A bright spot came on her cheek and a feverish, eager light into her eyes. She was trying for courage against the opposition she expected.

"Don't ask me that, my darling. I will do anything else you please, but I cannot let you see Janet."

Mary got up from her chair and

stood facing him, for he had turned away from her as he answered. "What is this you are hiding from me?" she said. "It is something I ought to know: other people know it, and you keep it hidden from me. Richard, it is because Janet knows something you do not wish her to know that you drive her away from Rookstone. No, don't stop me: I want to tell you everything. I knew Janet came here in January. I thought then it was cruel of you not to let her see me, but I know now that you were afraid she would tell me what she knew."

"What are you talking of, Mary?" he said with an oath, but he turned so pale that she felt sure she had hit on the truth. "You have grown crazed sitting up here with your moping fancies." He stopped and made a strong effort at self-control. "Come out into the sunshine and get rid of all these follies."

But his vehemence had roused his wife, and, like many another timid woman, having once forced herself to the attack, she grew bold in maintaining it. Blotted out for the time by her baby's sudden death, Kitty's words had recurred with terrible significance during these long, lonely hours. She had spoken just now at random in her anger at his refusal, scarcely believing in the existence of a secret; but Richard's sudden paleness and agitation awakened a deep and overmastering dread.

Strangely, too, in that moment of suspicion the affection which ever since her sorrow had seemed frozen and stagnant, now welled up again to shield her husband from harm.

"Richard"—she spoke so solemnly that he was compelled to listen—"what is this? Tell me, darling—I shall love you just the same—but is it true that you ought not to have Rookstone?"

"No, it is not; and if Janet told you this, I feel more than ever glad that I separated you from her."

But he did not meet her eyes as he answered, and try as she would against it, a doubt of her husband rose in Mary's mind. "It was not Janet," she said, gravely: "it was old Kitty."

Richard inwardly cursed the old woman. "I don't care who it was: you ought not to have listened to such nonsense." He turned angrily away.

She reached him before he opened the door to go away: "Are you quite, quite sure it is nonsense? I love you so much, darling, that I will believe you did all for the best if you will only tell me all the truth."

He turned round suddenly and faced her: "Mary, I have been such a husband to you as few women possess, but if you persist in this folly you will drive me away from you: if you cannot be happy with me, you will have to try a lonely life."

He left her. She cried bitterly at having roused his anger, but she could not get rid of her doubts: do what she would to lay them, they revived. Oh, if she could only see Janet and ask her how she ought to act! She resolved to make one more appeal to Richard. If he would not let Janet come to Rookstone, he would perhaps consent to let her go up to London and see her sister.

CHAPTER XLVI.

JEALOUSY.

THE result of Thompson's visit to Vincent Square was that Janet determined once more to see Mr. Painson. On the day when Henry had met her at the railway station, Janet had discovered, rather from instinctive perception than from any open complaint on his part, that her lover disliked her visits to the old lawyer. Since that time she had not consulted him. Her secret being laid at rest, she had felt independent of Mr. Painson's counsels; but, besides this, she had a secret dislike to seeking them.

Lately, Mrs. Webb had invited Mr. Painson to dinner. He had come more than once, and at every visit it had seemed to Janet as if he purposely disagreed with Henry Wenlock; and moreover, her lover, so happy-tempered and friendly toward every one, was always irritated by Mr. Painson's presence.

"He is never a bit like himself when

Mr. Painson comes," thought Janet. "It is plain they do not like each other, and I wish Mrs. Webb would not ask them to meet."

But Mrs. Webb saw the mutual dislike between the two men, and understood it. She had resolved by this time to set aside Janet's marriage. Besides her own wishes in the matter, she believed that Louisa had a liking for Henry Wenlock. She did not dream that so well brought up a girl as her daughter could have ventured on the extreme impropriety of falling in love. Mrs. Webb's creed was that that love is the safest and best wearing which comes after marriage, but she thought it was quite natural that Louisa should admire Henry Wenlock, and think him handsomer and more agreeable than any one else who visited in Vincent Square.

Mrs. Webb never had believed in the reality of Henry's attachment to Janet. He had fancied himself in love with her, no doubt, before he went to India, and now held to his engagement from some overstrained notion of honor; but if he could once be seriously offended, made actually jealous, Mrs. Webb believed that he was impetuous enough to break off at once with Janet and propose to some one else.

"And it must be Louy's own fault if she is not the person—so much more suitable in every way. The difficulty lies with Janet: I don't wish to injure the poor thing, but she and Mr. Painson would pair off so nicely together. I can see the whole thing. If only another quarrel would come up between these two ill-matched young people, it would be easy enough. I would not let matters take their course as I did last time. The fact of the matter was, that I had no idea they would ever make it up so quickly: I did not think that little Janet was so deep. Very foolish too, for she'll never be happy with Henry, and she's just the wife for Mr. Painson. She would be richer, too, and she used to be so fond of him."

In making these reflections, Mrs. Webb scarcely did justice to her own shrewdness. She had, it is true, con-

templated marrying her daughter to Janet's promised husband, but Henry Wenlock's scanty means had been a serious drawback, in spite of his appearance and titled connections. Within the last fortnight an event had occurred which had placed him on quite another footing in her eyes. It has been said that soon after his return to England he went down into the country to visit some relations—Lord and Lady Fletcher. These people had just lost their only son, and, although there were several daughters, the property was strictly entailed, and must, unless another son were born, descend with the title to Henry Wenlock. Another son might be born, but this was not probable. It seemed to Mrs. Webb that Henry was tolerably safe, and surely it would not matter how humble Louisa's home was at first, if eventually she were to succeed to a title. A title! Mrs. Webb could not control her excitement when she thought of it—to own a title, or to be on visiting terms with the person who owned one, being a privilege, in her eyes, more to be coveted than any other. People might be foolish, ignorant, ill-bred, insolent, but if they were titled, that which they did was to be imitated and applauded: no subservience was too low, no praise too high, to bestow on them. She had been trying to arrange her plans rather more definitely lately. As a primary measure she had informed Henry Wenlock that Mr. Painson was evidently in love with Janet, and then she had taken every possible opportunity of throwing the two men together. She noticed Janet's avoidance of her old friend, and it puzzled her. Mrs. Webb would have given much if she could have found out that her young cousin still sought the lawyer's advice, as she had done after her mother's death.

"Well, he is coming to dinner to-night," Mrs. Webb said, "and I must do what I can: much may happen in a month."

This was the day of Thompson's visit, and when Janet heard Mr. Painson announced, she resolved to ask him

to see her the next morning at his office.

She was afraid Henry would not approve of her doing this; but after thinking the matter over, she had come to the conclusion that it was the only course left to her. If anything were to be done with respect to Leroux, it would be much better that Mr. Painson should appear in the affair than that she should do so. If the man were at once told that his suspicions were valueless, he would not try to act on them. What Janet dreaded was, that if Leroux endeavored to get at the papers which he knew had so terrified her mother, and Richard discovered him, he would suspect that Janet was the Frenchman's employer, and harden himself yet more against the confession of his own guilt. She must see Mr. Painson.

It was not a large party—composed chiefly of young unmarried people and Mr. Painson. He took Mrs. Webb in to dinner: she had managed to place Henry and Janet at the other end of the table, and another pair of engaged lovers beside Mr. Painson, so she had the lawyer to herself. She asked him how he thought Janet was. He glanced down the table: Janet was looking grave, without the bright smile which had lately become habitual to her, and as he kept his eyes fixed on her, she looked at him anxiously.

"Not quite so well as the last time I saw her," he said to Mrs. Webb.

"Ah! you see it, then? Poor girl! as the time draws near I'm afraid she has misgivings. I believe there never was more complete self-deception on both sides than in that marriage."

Mrs. Webb drew her thin lips together, and put all the significance they were capable of expressing into her small black eyes.

Mr. Painson felt interested. This was a new view of things: he wanted to hear more. He knew very little of Mrs. Webb, but he thought her a pretty-mannered woman enough, and her recent civilities had disposed him to judge her favorably.

"Do you really? I always under-

stood it was a marriage of attachment on both sides."

She laughed. "I sometimes think, Mr. Painson, that in this world we have only to label things according to our own notions, in order to make other people think the same. I was told that it was a marriage of attachment; but then you see I am a mother, and mothers have wonderful insight in these matters, especially when a girl in poor dear Janet's position is confided to them: besides, you see, I can remember my own dear mother's anxiety about me. Do you know, Mr. Painson, she could hardly make up her mind to part with me, even to Mr. Webb? 'Louy, my dear,' she said, 'if you are not going to be happy, I shall break my heart.' It was fortunate for me, you see, that I had such an unexceptionable husband, for after that I could not have let my mother know any extent of misery—she would have broken her heart." Mrs. Webb looked down in a sentimental manner and sighed, too much taken up by herself just then to notice Mr. Painson's weariness.

"How one thing calls up another!" she said. "Dear me! it seems only yesterday that I was stroking my old cat, and mamma said, 'I can't let the cat go too, Louy. It wouldn't do, you know: I should miss you both so dreadfully;' so, as I thought John would not be satisfied with the cat instead of me, I thought it better to let mamma keep it. I'm afraid you'll think me very silly."

She looked up in his face with such a would-be-sixteen air that Mr. Painson wondered. "The old fool!" he said to himself: "she must be forty-five if she's a day." But he said aloud, "Very charming, indeed." Then more gravely, "But why do you consider our young friends ill-matched?"

"Why, it's just this"—she gave a quick glance round: Henry was talking to Mr. Webb, and Janet was listening to him—"he has no appreciation for her remarkable powers of mind. You think her very clever, don't you?"

"Very—altogether superior."

"Yes, I know you must think so; and she has already discovered this want of sympathy, and will pine for the support of a higher mind: in fact, what Janet is suited for is to be the wife of a man much older than herself. I have thought—but this may be only a fancy of mine—whether she has not met with such a mind since she engaged herself; but she is so reserved, and has such a high sense of honor, that she would sacrifice herself before any one could discover if this were so."

Mr. Painson grew more and more interested. Even Mrs. Webb's silliness was forgotten as he listened to her. "This would be very sad," he said. "Am I to understand that you consider this was a mere boy-and-girl liking, which time and absence have been too much for?"

"That is exactly what I do mean. I believe, if one only dared to interfere, that both would be much happier apart, and yet it is just one of those cases in which I see no possibility of interference."

"I must say I can't agree with you," said Mr. Painson, curtly. And then he began to talk on other topics so decidedly that Mrs. Webb saw the matter must be left quiet for the present.

As soon as the gentlemen came up stairs, Mr. Painson went up to Janet and remained talking to her nearly all the rest of the evening. She had never found such a charm in his conversation. He talked to her of her father, whom he remembered in his boyhood—of the early years of her parents' married life—till her heart filled with sad, sweet memories, and her eyes grew liquid with tenderness. At first, when she saw Henry standing near her, she had wished Mr. Painson far away, but by degrees she became deeply interested, and her impatience changed into earnest listening. Mr. Painson paused at last, and then she made her request for an interview next morning. His face beamed with delight. Janet scarcely knew why, but she blushed at the eagerness with which he expressed his readiness to see her.

"Come, come, Janet," said Mrs. Webb: "I cannot let you keep Mr. Painson all to yourself in this way. I want him to hear Louisa sing."

She carried him off in triumph to the piano. Henry Wenlock was standing there, but seeing the coast clear, he moved toward the other room, where Janet sat alone now, for the other guests had crowded round Louisa.

"Wait a moment," said Mrs. Webb, as he passed her. She was beside him a minute afterward. "I want to tell you something; only I have such a horror of interfering," she whispered.

"So have I." Henry smiled and looked on toward Janet. He heartily wished Mrs. Webb were a man instead of a woman. But she was resolved not to lose an opportunity of breeding discord.

"Do you remember what I told you about Mr. Painson—I mean his attachment?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, he has been talking to me about her all dinner-time—went so far as to say it would be very sad for her to marry if she did not love her husband as well as she once thought she did. Now, don't be so very impatient. What I think is, that Janet ought to be told this, and then really she would not give the poor old man so much encouragement: she is positively going to call on him to-morrow."

"Very likely." But Henry Wenlock bit his lip, and Mrs. Webb let him go on to Janet, sure that her words would rankle.

Janet looked so radiant with happiness at his approach that he had no heart to say anything in the way of complaint, and Mrs. Webb's manoeuvres would have been fruitless if Henry had not been beside Janet when her old friend said "Good-night" to her.

"To-morrow, then." That was all, but Mr. Painson looked ten years younger as he spoke it, and Wenlock felt as if he could have thrown him out of the window with the greatest satisfaction. Repressed wrath seldom fails to break bounds, and all the smothered

impatience of the first part of the evening blazed into fire. What did the old idiot mean by looking in that sentimental manner? and what need had he to hold Janet's hand in his a moment?

Mrs. Webb took good care to leave Henry alone with Janet as soon as the door closed on Mr. Painson.

"What are you going to do to-morrow, Janet?" he said. "I cannot imagine how you can tolerate that old noodle."

"Oh, Henry, remember what a friend he has been to us all, and how long he has known us!"

"What did he mean about to-morrow?"

A slight flush rose on Janet's cheek. She did not wish to keep her visit a secret, but Henry's tone was unpleasant: it was harsh and suspicious.

"Only that he would see me at his office: I asked him if I might go there."

"If it is only a business question, I really think you had better employ either me or Mr. Webb. I don't like the notion of your going about by yourself to a lawyer's office."

"I have been there before."

"I know you have, and I disliked it then. I really wish you would send a note instead of going to-morrow."

Janet's spirit rose. This interference seemed to her very like tyranny. Her mother had always urged her to consult Mr. Painson, and why should Henry oppose it? She looked at him frankly: "I think you are a little unreasonable to-night, dearest. I have one or two things to say to Mr. Painson. This will be my last visit to him."

"Why could you not say them to-night? If you persist in calling on him to-morrow, I will go with you: it will be better in all ways."

"I must go alone," she said quietly, although her heart ached at this fresh cause of disagreement: "it is simply a family matter. If you like, Henry, I will promise that it shall be my last visit, but I must go to-morrow."

"Very well—do as you like. It is plain your own will is of more importance than any wish of mine. Good-night."

"Don't go away angry." Her eyes were full of tears, but he did not look at her. He wanted to get away before he should say something which she could not forgive. He was possessed with jealous anger.

CHAPTER XLVII.

LEROUX'S TIDINGS.

NEXT morning at breakfast Janet found Louisa and her mother in angry discussion.

"The fact of the matter is, my dear, that you are growing very self-willed and unfeminine, just like some one else I know." Janet's entrance checked Mrs. Webb's words.

Louisa looked sulky. "It is so dull here," she said: "you do nothing but pay visits from morning till night, and Janet thinks of nothing but Christy. If I were going to be married, I should take rather more interest in my gowns than you do, Janet. I want to go to Julia Fuller: she would like to have me—I know she would: there is some fun to be got out of Julia." And Louisa gave a dreary sigh. She had grown to like Henry Wenlock very much indeed.

While Janet had talked to Mr. Painson on the previous evening, Henry had stood beside Louisa at the piano, and had praised her singing. "Poor dear fellow!" she sighed to herself, "it's all over with him: there's no chance of that ridiculous engagement being broken off, now the day is fixed; but I know how he feels—it is quite a sacrifice. Really, if I'm to feel like this when he goes away, I would rather not see him any more till he is Janet's husband. Then I suppose there will be no danger in flirting with a married man: besides, he will be my cousin."

She said all this to herself in her own room, and then she remembered a long-standing invitation from an old school-friend, and determined to accept it at once.

Before Janet left the breakfast-table Louisa had carried her point. Her journey into Norfolk was to take place

early next morning, but her mother made her promise to return at the end of a fortnight.

It was very trying to Mrs. Webb that Louisa should be so restive just when all her schemes seemed likely to prove fruitful; but then, as she told herself, Louisa could be very unattractive when she chose to be so, and if her will was crossed in this matter she would probably sulk for a week. If Henry really cared for her daughter—and Mrs. Webb fondly cherished this hope—a short absence might awaken warmer feelings, especially just now when he had gone away angry with Janet: Mrs. Webb had been too far off to hear what had passed, but she had studied the young man's face intently during his talk with Janet. "What an obstinate girl that is!" she said. Mrs. Webb was looking out of the window, for, busy as she asserted herself to be, she never lost sight of the doings of others. In fact, to watch, chronicle and criticise these for the mental food of her fellow-gossips was the chief business of Mrs. Webb's life, and the work for which she appeared best suited. As she looked now she saw Janet crossing the square. "Going to old Painson's, of course. I could not have believed Janet so short-sighted, after Henry Wenlock's angry looks last night. I really do think she likes the old man the best. Taking that child Christy with her too!—so very absurd! If she really felt the impropriety of the thing as she ought to feel it, she would have asked me to chaperon her. Not she! I really believe her abominable self-will has infected Louy."

Mrs. Webb's suspicion that Janet liked Mr. Painson grew stronger when Janet came back from her visit. Lately, the young girl's spirits had been daily recovering from the depression which so much sorrow had laid on them, but this morning she was silent and preoccupied. Mrs. Webb rallied her, but Janet's thoughtfulness was plainly caused by anxiety: she soon relapsed into it again with bent brow and firmly-closed lips.



PART VIII.

CHAPTER XLVII.—*Continued.*

JANET was both unhappy and anxious. She had found it difficult to get Mr. Painson to listen to her on the subject of Leroux. He had been so eager to talk to her about herself and her feelings, and when she did succeed in fixing his attention he treated her information lightly, and told her not to think about the matter—to send Leroux to him. He had been so strangely different, so excited, so changed from the half-scolding, fatherly manner she was used to, that Janet had felt puzzled and disquieted, and at parting from him the warm admiration his eyes expressed had made her withdraw her hand abruptly from the very close grasp in which he held it. She was sitting in her own room now—Mrs. Webb's joking and tittering laugh had become unbearable—and she asked herself why she had thus shrunk from Mr. Painson, why she felt such an unutterable repugnance at the idea of ever having again to consult him. A warm blush rose to answer her. She had thought Henry harsh and unreasonable, but she understood his meaning now; and yet it was too vain, too foolish, to believe that Mr. Painson loved her. No: the reason why she shrank from him was because he had found fault with Henry. She went in thought slowly over the morning's interview, and her first conviction deepened. Mr. Painson had asked her very earnestly if she was quite sure that the marriage she contemplated would promote her happiness; and when she had answered him—half in doubt whether he were not jesting—he had sighed. "Of course I must believe your assurance," he said; "but I hope Mr. Wenlock will know

how to treat a wife better than most young men do—ah!" and then he shook his head, and Janet got up to go away, feeling vexed and disturbed.

She began to think that it had been a mistake to consult any one except Henry. Mr. Painson had imagined that she reposed greater confidence in him than she did in her future husband; but then her mother had strictly enjoined her to consult no one but Mr. Painson, and she remembered, with a sudden new light on it, the lawyer's refusal to help her unless she promised entire secrecy.

"But he did not think about me then in this way, I am sure of it; and after all, it may only be a vain fancy of mine. Still, I cannot go to his office again unless Henry goes with me."

The door opened, and Mrs. Webb came in: "So sorry to disturb you, dear, but there is some one wanting to see you; and as it seems to me that he may be an impostor, I thought I would just come and ask you a question or two first."

Janet looked her answer: she knew Mrs. Webb could tell her own tale without help.

"I cannot think you know this man; he won't say where he comes from, or give his name either; but I am sure he is a foreigner—I should say an Italian—by his dark appearance: he keeps on saying he wants to see Mees Wolf-erston."

"I believe I know who it is," said Janet: "he had better come here and speak to me."

"Really, my dear, had you not better see him in the hall? Suppose he is a swindler: he may take your watch and purse—rob the house, in fact—

and be off before we know a word about it."

"No, he is not a swindler"—Janet smiled—"but I can see him in the dining-room, if you don't like him to come up stairs."

"Yes, dear, I really think it will be much better; and it so happens I'm sitting there just now, doing my accounts: it wouldn't do at all, you know, for you to see a person of this kind alone."

"Then I'm afraid he must come up here, after all," said Janet, resolutely: "I must see him alone, for I know his business is private: you can settle it whichever way you please."

Mrs. Webb had learned by this time that this short, decided manner of Janet's, which she alone had the art of eliciting, admitted of no appeal, and therefore she said Janet had better come down stairs; she really could not give unknown foreigners the run of her house.

Said very spitefully, but entirely lost on her young cousin. Janet guessed that her visitor was Leroux, and shrinking, as she had learned to shrink during the last few hours, from Mr. Painson's good offices, it was very painful to be obliged to refer this man to him—for doubtless the Frenchman had come to make her an offer of his services—on the subject of the will.

It was Leroux, looking so exceedingly bright and happy that for a moment Janet thought he must be the bearer of good tidings.

"Have you brought me any message from Rookstone?" she said.

Leroux shrugged his shoulders: "I have a message for you, Mees Wolf-erston, but it is not from Rookstone."

"Who is it from?" Janet spoke very coldly.

"It is from the sister of mademoiselle—Madame Wolf-erston: she is in London now."

"In London!" Janet got up from her chair: she must go to Mary at once.

"I have not yet given the message." The Frenchman looked surprised at her

impatience: at Rookstone, Janet had appeared such a quiet, sedate personage. He paused till she had reseated herself, and then he shrugged his shoulders: "Mademoiselle, there has been a great deal of chagrin at Rookstone. First, the bebbie have died. Ah! it is a very sad accident: it is too horrible that a child's life must pay for a bundle of wood."

"I heard of the accident, but I don't understand," said Janet.

"Ah! mademoiselle have not heard how the accident have arrived. Bon! Monsieur is driving madame one fine evening, and madame has the bebbie on her knees: there is an old and ugly woman—Robbins or Kittee she is called—and this old woman puts it in her head to gather a fagot in the path of the carriage. Madame talks to the bebbie, and I imagine monsieur looks on and smiles. Suddenly, crac! the horses jump, the carriage turn over, and madame and the bebbie are on the ground. Well, mademoiselle, we all go: I especially lead on the rest. I find madame and her bebbie, and bring them home: they seem well, quite gay and happy, and then in the evening I hear a cry from the nursery. Madame is there—she bend over the bebbie. She say, 'Run, fly! fetch the doctor, quick, quick—my child dies!' Well, mademoiselle, I go, I run, I almost fly; but of what use? Alas! none. When I arrive back with the doctor the bebbie is only a little corpse."

Janet sighed deeply. "How is my sister now?" she asked.

Leroux shook his head very gravely, and his eyebrows followed the movement of his shoulders. "Ah!"—he drew out the word—"that is ended a serious question, Mees Wolf-erston; but you will see her to-morrow, and then you will know for yourself. At first, madame do not eat or drink, and I think she do not sleep neither, for she keep so pale and ill: then she write to you two, three times: I hear her tell Mr. Wolf-erston she will do so, and he become very angry ended."

"Stop!" said Janet: "I do not want

to hear of any disagreements between Mr. and Mrs. Wolferston."

The Frenchman opened his eyes, and the corners of his moustaches rose perceptibly: "Bien, mademoiselle! as you will; but your sister will tell you, and everybody at Rookstone will tell you also, that Mr. Wolferston is a changed man. No one know what has 'appened to him, but since a week he is more extraordinary than I can say: he suspect' everything: he suspect' madame and me too; and suddenly yesterday he tell to me to pack everything he shall be able to 'want for several months, and to come in France with him."

"To France!" exclaimed Janet, but the Frenchman went on:

"Well, I was very much surprise, and we all were surprise. I do not think madame wish to go, for I see her always crying. Yesterday, but just as we go in train, Mr. Wolferston leave her for one moment, and she beckon me. 'Leroux,' she say, 'as soon as we shall arrive in London, you will go to my sister in Vincent Square, and you will tell her to come to me to-morrow morning at eight o'clock, at the hotel we go to.'"

"And where is she now?"

"We are all in a hotel in Cavendish Square—a very dull place, I think, for London."

"Stay"—while she spoke Janet had opened her desk—"I will send my sister a note."

In her excitement at Leroux's tidings she had entirely forgotten Richard's prohibition. She wrote a few hasty lines, and Leroux departed with them. He could not tell her how long his master meant to remain in London, but he said he fancied Mr. Wolferston must have some business to transact before he could start for France.

When he was gone it seemed to Janet that she was in a dream. Was Mary a prisoner, being carried off against her will? and what had happened to Richard to cause the change Leroux spoke of? She remembered Richard's prohibition now, but she no longer heeded

it. It seemed to her that if Mary, loving her husband as she did, could send for her in this secret manner, she must have some urgent cause for so doing, and that she was bound to protect her sister at all risks. That warm, sheltering love, the germ of motherhood, which holds so large a place in some women's natures, stirred Janet's heart now so strongly that she could not keep back her tears. It seemed as if she could hardly wait till eight o'clock to-morrow.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

JANET'S NOTE.

WHAT had come to Richard? Mary had been asking herself this vainly of late, and still she could find no answer to her question.

Kitty's words on that memorable evening in the grassed road had wakened a confused and misty uneasiness, but till Mary put her doubt in words and saw how strangely her husband was affected by it, it had not gained any strength: probably, had she never spoken it to him, it would have withered out of existence. But ever since she had spoken she had been aware of a strange change in her husband's manner toward her—a change which seemed to have a deeper cause than her words, for it was not directed to her only. Richard seemed tormented by some inward anxiety which kept him ever restless, ever watchful over the movements of those among whom he lived. He rarely left his wife, but he took no pleasure in her companionship: he sat silent for hours, and if he did leave her, he always reappeared suddenly, as if he wanted to take her by surprise. Was he fretting for the loss of his child? Mary asked herself; but in other ways he gave no sign of this. She noticed, too, how he watched the movements of the servants. Once she found him at her writing-desk diligently examining its contents, and she would have paid no heed to this but for her husband's sudden start of alarm, as if he had been caught in the commission of some crime.

• She longed to ask what ailed him, but ever since the birth of her child Mary had learned to fear her husband. He was rarely angry with her, but she knew what his anger could be, and she shrank from rousing it. Besides, since her last appeal about Janet, there had been a reserve between them which seemed to poor Mary impassable.

One morning he told her his intention of taking her to France: she remonstrated, but he took no notice. Then for the first time since her marriage Mary felt rebellious: "I cannot go, Richard: it would break my heart to leave baby's grave."

Even then he turned coldly away. "You do not know what is good for you," he said, gloomily: "you are fretting yourself to death here—change is absolutely necessary for you."

She protested, but he was deaf, and she left the home of her childhood, and of her married life also, weeping passionate tears—tears whose bitterness lay in the distrust her husband felt toward her.

As yet the doubt Kitty's words had wakened had not weakened Mary's love. Women love on even when all semblance of good is stripped from the idol they worship; and doubtless this fond clinging love has done as much in winning souls from sin as the more severe virtue which can only love what is unstained.

Mary believed her husband was really still the same, obscured for the present by some dreadful anxiety, which she, alas! was too weak and incapable to share; but she had no patience to wait for this to clear away. She longed to question him openly, but he had once threatened to leave her, and something told her that Richard was not a man to threaten twice.

She knew they must make some stay in London, and she resolved to see Janet; but she felt that this meeting must be effected without her husband's knowledge. He left her alone so seldom now. There was only one way. Richard always breakfasted in his dressing-room, never coming down stairs till ten

o'clock. It seemed to Mary that in a strange hotel it would be quite possible for her to see Janet quietly before her husband appeared. Janet was so wise, she would tell her what to do. She said this as a reason for disobeying her husband's orders; but Mary was longing for her sister's love—longing to pour out this overwhelming sorrow to one who would really comfort her. She had set aside and neglected the safe ways in which she had been reared: now in sorrow she longed to return to them, not so much from repentance as from expectation of the comfort they would bring.

"Janet has always been so good and religious," she said, "the very look of her will give me help."

And then, as we know, she had watched her opportunity, and, beckoning Leroux to the railway carriage, had given him the message for her sister.

She was sitting now with Janet's reply in her hand. Richard had only just left her to smoke a cigar, and although Leroux had returned some time ago, he had not before found an opportunity to deliver Janet's note to his mistress.

Mary's perceptions of right and wrong-doing had become blunted during the past year, but a quick flush rose on her cheek as the man gave her the note. Richard might be harsh to her, but was not this a deliberate act of deceit? But a blunted conscience or a stifled one is soon hushed. It was for a good purpose that she wanted to see Janet: both her husband and herself would be happier for the advice and guidance she should get from her sister.

She read the note again. Richard would be soon back. Janet said she hoped to be in Cavendish Square next morning punctually at eight o'clock: there was nothing else to be gleaned from the note except a few loving words; but just now Mary hungered for love, and she read these over and over again.

She was very, very weary. Yesterday had been a day of passionate sorrow and anger: she had passed a sleepless night, and then had come the fr-

tigue of the journey and the wrench of leaving her baby's grave. She sat with her fair head resting on her hand, the soft waxen light falling on her lovely face, while she read Janet's letter; and as she read the lines seemed to cross one over another, her head became heavier and heavier—she was fast asleep.

The door opened gently, and Richard came in. For a moment he stood looking at his sleeping wife, and if Mary had then opened her eyes and met his look of wistful tenderness, much sorrow might have been spared her. But she did not wake: she could not hear his tread on the rich soft carpet as he advanced toward her, and as he advanced he saw the open letter in the hand which had sunk on her lap. His face darkened instantly. A letter! How was it possible she had received one when their journey had been planned and executed with such speed? But he did not hesitate: he drew the note from between her fingers and read it. Surprise, utter, unbounded astonishment that his docile plaything of a wife was capable of conspiring against him, had an equal share with the anger that rose against her. He had been thunderstruck when at Rookstone she had avowed her knowledge of her sister's visit; but then he knew that she was aware also that he had sent Janet away again. Fear of his displeasure might have produced concealment. This was quite different. Something in the tender words, coming from so cold a person as he considered Janet to be, assured him that Mary had complained to her sister, had appealed to her for love and protection, and an uneasy consciousness of his late coldness and neglect made itself felt. But Mary had brought that on herself by daring to question him, and as the remembrance of her words came back his face grew darker still. How did he know the number of secret letters that had been passing, or how Mary had been watching him during these last few days? He had suspected her at Rookstone, but he had almost smiled at his

own suspicions: now they took definite shape. His suspicions only rested on Mary—he never thought of Leroux. He knew what he dreaded, and he knew also that to avert the fulfillment of that dread, Mary and Janet must never meet again—never, that is to say, till change of scene had obliterated certain memories from the mind of his wife.

While he stood there thinking his face had hardened into the expression of a set purpose. He looked at his wife. She started, and a sob escaped her, but she did not waken. Bending over her gently, he replaced the letter as he had found it, and left the room as noiselessly as he had entered it.

CHAPTER XLIX.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

THE summer-like spring had been delusive—a mirage of the season which we know is too far off to be real yet; but it had lasted long enough to deceive poor credulous vegetation, and the biting wind of this morning set the green leaves shriveling, in the vain hope that by curling up their edges they could protect themselves from the fierce enemy. Not they: the wind only laughed at their efforts, and scorched all verdure out of them.

Janet shivered as she stepped out of a cab at the hotel to which Leroux had directed her. She heard the clocks striking eight as she passed into the entrance hall.

Presently a servant appeared. "Can I see Mrs. Wolferston?"

"I'll see, ma'am;" and the waiter, who looked as if he were only just awake, disappeared again.

"Mrs. Wolferston is not here, ma'am—left quite early this morning," he said, on returning.

"This morning!" Janet felt so stunned that she did not know what to say next.

"Yes, ma'am—for the Continent, I believe."

"Do you know if they left any letter or message?"

"I'll inquire, ma'am, if you will wait one moment;" and he showed her into a small waiting-room.

Gone! What could this mean? and then it flashed upon Janet that Richard had discovered her intended visit, and had taken this means of preventing a meeting between her and her sister. But why should he be at such pains to keep them apart? And as she remembered Mary's blind devotion to her husband, it seemed to her that matters must be greatly changed between them before her sister would send for her against his wishes; for Janet had quite comprehended that the intended meeting of this morning was to have been kept from Richard's knowledge. It seemed to her that some mystery lay under this sudden flight. She tried to think over all that Leroux had said yesterday.

The waiter came back: "There is no note or message left, ma'am. Mr. and Mrs. Wolferston and their man-servant—the lady brought no maid with her—left here this morning to catch the tidal train at Charing Cross. Their luggage was addressed 'Paris.'"

There was no use in staying any longer. The cab was waiting, and Janet went back in it to Vincent Square. A deep, dark fear had taken hold of her.

Had Mary reason to suspect that which she herself suspected? Had she also seen the fatal will which had stirred up so much sorrow and anxiety? It seemed to Janet this must be so, and that her sister's anxiety to see her arose from this knowledge, and from her terror at finding herself in possession of such a secret. But then if Mary loved Richard would she wish to betray him? This was a question Janet dared not answer. How strangely her mother's early prejudice against Mary's marriage was vindicating itself, and how bitterly her own interference on Richard's behalf was brought home to her! She prayed earnestly for her unhappy sister—prayed, too, that she herself might never be exposed to such a trial of love and truth. She reached Vincent Square

before her cousins had left their bedrooms, and in the excitement and bustle of Louisa's departure her morning expedition seemingly escaped the notice of even Mrs. Webb.

Louisa had just driven off, accompanied by her father, and Janet went to her own room. She wanted to think over what had happened, and to plan some means of communicating with her sister. Mr. Painson would soon find out some trace of Mary's destination, but she could not apply to Mr. Painson. She must trust the matter to Henry; and, dearly as she loved him, Janet knew that the very qualities she prized in her lover—his outspoken frankness, his manly sincerity and horror of mystery or subterfuge—would unfit him for the task.

While she sat thinking a letter was brought to her. The address was almost illegible, but it was written by Mary. Janet's heart gave a great bound. The excitement of the last few days was unnerving her, although it strung her up into a temporary feverish excitement. There were only these few words: "Follow me quickly. You will soon overtake us. Remember, you promised to come whenever I asked you. I shall die if you do not come.—MARY, Hôtel des Princes, Rue de Richelieu. This is where we went before, so I expect we shall go there now."

Blotted, smeared with traces of hot tears, it was plain to Janet that her sister had been taken away by surprise and against her will, and her indignation rose against Richard. She wrote to Henry at once at his office, begging him to come to her as soon as he could. She would explain the reason of her hasty summons when she saw him. She went out and posted the note herself, glad of any movement or exertion. She was far too highly wrought to sit quietly, letting events take their natural course; and even with all the tasks she set herself to accomplish, the hours passed slowly and heavily till the time when she might reasonably expect her lover. He might have come sooner—

she knew that—but then he might have been detained; but when an hour had gone by from the time of his expected arrival, she grew very anxious.

It was not yet four o'clock. Leaving word with the servant that if Captain Wenlock called he was to be asked to await her return, she went herself to his lodgings. In answer to her inquiry, she learned that he had that morning received a telegram, and had gone away immediately.

"Did he leave any message?"

"No, nothing—only I knows he won't be back by Sunday."

The stolid, stupefied-looking servant, who worked incessantly from morning till night, and then got about six hours' sleep in an underground kitchen, "had not seen Captain Wenlock when he went away." If she had taken the trouble to inquire, she would have found that her mistress had a note for Miss Wolferston—a note in which Henry told her that the telegram summoned him to Lord Fletcher without a moment's delay.

Later in the evening, when the mistress was going out, she gave this note in charge to the servant to deliver if any one should come from Miss Wolferston. In his hurry, Henry Wenlock had given no directions about posting it, and in fear of a reprimand for her previous neglect of inquiry, the maid settled her conscience by putting the note on the fire.

Janet felt puzzled and uncertain: it seemed to be a clear duty to follow Mary. Henry could not help her, Mr. Painson should not, and yet she could not go to Paris by herself: she might take Thompson, but then Thompson would probably not be able to leave her business at a moment's notice, and it was plain to Janet that if she wished to trace her sister easily, she must not delay.

As she walked home debating this question with herself, a new thought occurred to her. Aunt Dawson! she was always good-natured and willing to serve any one. This certainly was not an ordinary request, but still she could make it.

She had just passed a cab-stand: she hurried back to it, and desired to be driven to Harley street.

It seemed to Janet as if the first steps were accomplished when she heard that Mrs. Dawson was at home.

"Very glad to see you, I'm sure, my dear: if I hadn't had callers I was going to drive round and ask you to spend a few of these last single days with me: eh, what do you say now?"

Janet smiled: she felt less excited now. "I should like it very much, thank you; but I have a summons to join Mary, and she is in Paris, and I don't like to travel alone: it would not be quite nice, would it?"

"Nice! Dear me, no! Nice! I should say exceedingly nasty. Why, when I was a girl, Janet, I should not have thought of going about in a cab alone; and as to traveling, in that girls have altered more than any other thing since I was young: it seems to me they do everything that a man can do, and yet they give themselves up far more to dress and vanities than they used to do; and as to the way they display their ankles—well, I can only hope the rising generation have well-shaped feet."

Janet's impatience grew uncontrollable: "But, aunt, I must really go to Mary: she has lost her baby: she is, I fear, ill and unhappy. Will you go with me?"

Traveling was very pleasant to Mrs. Dawson, but then her traveling was always planned and executed with considerable forethought. The planning and replanning the route; the diligent study of "Murray;" the purchase of various "traveling requisites," most of which she never used; the numerous notes of arrangement which had to pass, before all was done, between herself and the chosen friend who was to share her tour,—all these little preliminaries constituted half the pleasure of the journey. She looked aghast at Janet's sudden proposal. "Go with you, my dear? Too early in the year, isn't it?—the equinox is hardly safely over, you know. Paris, you say? Should you want to pay a long visit, Janet?"

"Oh no: a couple of days would be quite sufficient. I don't like troubling you, but—but you seem the fittest person to apply to, aunt.

"Yes, yes, my dear, of course I am; and I certainly will go with you. But two days, dear child! Do you think I'm a firework or a railway engine, to go here, and there, and everywhere without a moment's rest? How soon do you want to start?"

She went through a fresh course of astonished remonstrance when Janet offered her the choice of crossing by that night's boat from Folkestone or of waiting for the early morning train; and finally she decided on the latter plan, with much self-condolence for the extraordinary effort she was making.

"But I was helpless," she said to herself when Janet had departed—"every bit as helpless as a screw in a hole that fits it: she drove me into it whether I liked it or not, and whether I do like it now I haven't the slightest idea."

CHAPTER L.

PURSUIT.

MARY sat in her bed-room in the Hôtel des Princes very white and trembling: her husband had a heavier frown on his face than she had ever seen there.

It was the day after their arrival, and something in the arrangements of the house had annoyed Mr. Wolferston. He gave orders in his wife's hearing to Leroux to remove at once to another hotel.

"I will not sleep here to-night," he had said.

Mary lost all self-control: a paroxysm of terror seized her lest she should miss Janet: "You must stay here, Richard. I have disobeyed you: I wrote to Janet before we left London: she will follow me. If I don't see her I shall die!"

For a few moments Richard did not speak, his anger so completely overmastered him: when he did, Mary hardly knew his voice: "Then you really expect your sister here?"

She could only bend her head by way of answer.

"Instead of moving to another hotel, we shall leave Paris at once. I have no time to say what I think of your conduct, but you see how utterly useless it is for you to attempt to deceive me."

She hid her eyes away from his: she could not bear the anger in his face. He left the room abruptly and summoned Leroux: "I shall leave Paris at once."

"*Bien*, monsieur: in one quarter of an hour all will be ready. If monsieur will tell to me the place to which we go, I will arrange for the trains and the luggage."

Leroux answered glibly, but the uneasiness in his face roused Mr. Wolferston's attention.

Richard took his time-table out of his pocket. "Rouen," he said: "that will do very well—even if we find it too long a journey, you and the luggage can get on to Rouen to-night."

"Ah, then, monsieur proposes to himself to make the voyage of La Normandie: it is a beautiful country, La Normandie—*bien*!"

The man's manner confirmed his master's suspicion. He felt less surprised now at the skill with which Mary had succeeded in deceiving him. "Leroux is in Janet's pay," he thought to himself, "and between them Mary will be taught falsehood; but I must put a stop to all this."

The carriage was soon announced. He went and fetched his wife and placed her in it. As they went toward the station he kept looking out of the window. He was thinking over what had happened. He determined to have no further explanation with Mary. He believed Janet had been influencing her by means of Leroux. Change of scene and new impressions would soon obliterate the remembrance of all that had caused this painful estrangement. He had cause enough for anxiety without any new bitterness of feeling—an anxiety that made him long for Mary's love as it had once been his—unquestioning, worshipping love, without one cloud on its enjoyment of present hap-

piness. The revelation in Leroux's face had added a fresh sting to his anxiety. But he had no time to sift this now. His one object was to elude Janet's pursuit and prevent a meeting between her and Mary.

It was nearly dark, and the lamps were all lighted. They had got into such a block of cabs and omnibuses that it was impossible to move on fast. Richard put his head out of the window. Just then a cab passed, and a face in it met his gaze fully. It was Janet! For an instant they looked at each other, spelled by surprise, and then the block of vehicles dispersed, and each carriage bore its occupants away.

Janet soon recovered herself. Her impulse was to follow Richard, but she had not seen Mary beside him, and there was no luggage on the carriage: he might be only going to another part of the city; so she told the driver to go on as fast as he could to the Hôtel des Princes.

"Dear me, child! how you are exciting yourself!" said the unconscious Mrs. Dawson. "No wonder you don't grow fat. You'll never make time a minute longer by hurrying it."

Janet could not answer. The remembrance of yesterday's disappointment was still vivid, and the nearer she drew to her journey's end the stronger her forebodings grew. When they reached the Hôtel des Princes, it was scarcely a surprise to hear that the English family had left it. She could not learn for some little time where they were bound.

At last a waiter was produced who knew all about it: "Mademoiselle is English—that is right: she is, then, the lady to whom Monsieur Leroux send word that he is gone in Normandy."

In the midst of her anxiety Janet smiled. She guessed that Mary had entrusted Leroux with the task of leaving traces of her movements. But there must be no delay if she meant to baffle Richard Wolferston. She glanced at Mrs. Dawson. The poor woman looked white and exhausted. It was

already evening. By sleeping in Paris and starting early next morning it seemed to Janet she might still overtake her sister.

She had left a letter for Henry with Mrs. Webb. She did not know where to write to him, and she felt sure he would go to Vincent Square so soon as he returned. She had told him in this letter the motive of her journey and her intention of returning speedily; but this unlooked-for accident would delay her return, and she resolved to write to Henry again and beg him to follow her as soon as he returned to London.

"I do not ask you to write," she said: "I may miss Mary again, and may have to move so rapidly from place to place that there is little chance of a letter reaching me; and for the same reason I may possibly not write to you again; but wherever I go I will leave a note for you at the inn we stay at, and this will enable you to follow and overtake us easily." And then she assured him tenderly of the comfort and help she should find in his presence. She also asked him to tell Mrs. Webb not to expect to hear from her, for she foresaw that writing would be almost an impossibility, as they might have to travel day and night too.

She felt sure that Richard was evading her purposely, and her conviction of his guilt strengthened. Still, unless he feared that she would betray him to Mary, she scarcely comprehended his motives for this avoidance. She felt happier when she had written to Henry, and then she submitted to Mrs. Dawson's orders and took some refreshment.

While the waiter was removing the supper things, Janet asked by what line of railroad people usually entered Normandy.

"Ah! mademoiselle, there are different ways: if you were going on to Caen, you would take train to Lisieux; but most people—above all, English peoples—have the wish to see Rouen: it is a beautiful city, the finest of small cities of the world. I am of Rouen, and I assure you, mesdames, there is

nothing which can to it be compared. Ah! but it is superb!"

His patriotic enthusiasm was wasted on Janet: here was a difficulty she had not counted on, and for a little while she sat in puzzled silence. However, the distance at last decided her: Rouen seemed so much more direct and accessible that it was not probable Richard would undertake the longer journey at such a late hour. Before she closed her letter to Henry she told him they were starting for Rouen.

The letter being finished at last, Mrs. Dawson insisted on sending her to bed: "I should like to know what Captain Wenlock would say to me if he saw your heavy eyes and pale cheeks? He'd say I ought to be shaken for consenting to this mad plan of starting off again to-morrow morning. I believe I'm a sad old fool, but it is only you young people that are too much for me. Folks of my own age, indeed! I should like to see one of them whisking me from Dan to Beersheba in such a fashion."

Janet smiled, for it was notorious that Aunt Dawson had never in her life found courage to say "No" to any one, except to two offers of marriage; and there are no means of proving what her answer would have been even in these two instances had the offers been spoken instead of written. It seemed due to herself to remonstrate with her niece; but in her heart the hurry and excitement of this pursuit had an interest which quite compensated for a little fatigue.

"It's almost like a novel," she said when Janet had left her—"as if one was among the characters. I don't mean for a moment to say I'm so foolish as to enjoy this. I should think not, indeed: it is only my sympathy with poor Janet. Strange thing, to be sure, it is how people are mismatched in this life! as Mrs. Webb says. She is always so sensible, is Mrs. Webb: you never catch her saying or doing anything foolish or enthusiastic. It really does seem to me that Captain Wenlock was far better suited to either Mary Wolferston or

Louy Webb than to Janet: he is not clever enough for her. She would have done better for that dark-eyed cousin of her father's; though, dear me! I could never have had the courage to marry the man if I had been a girl: he looks like what I should fancy a brigand might be or a pirate captain, or one of those sorts of book-people."

By this time Mrs. Dawson had finished putting up all the iron-gray ringlets in paper, and having carefully encased them in a frilled nightcap, she went to bed.

When Richard Wolferston reached the railway station he beckoned Leroux, who was standing near the luggage: "I am not going to Normandy: I have engaged a carriage to take us on to Meudon. You can bring the baggage that is wanted, and leave the heavy luggage here to be sent for."

His employer's face told Leroux that he was suspected, and without any attempt at delay he gave the necessary directions, and was soon on his way to Meudon with Mr. and Mrs. Wolferston.

CHAPTER LI.

MRS. WEBB MAKES THE BEST USE OF HER TIME.

MRS. WEBB, as has been seen, was a manœuvring woman—a woman who preferred the little crooked turnings and by-ways to the straight high-road of truth; and yet if circumstances had not, so to speak, played into her hands, she might have hesitated to plan and scheme out for herself her present conduct.

When a letter from Henry Wenlock to Janet reached her, she hesitated what to do with it, but after losing a post she sent it on to the Hôtel des Princes. It reached Paris just after Janet's departure for Rouen.

Early on the second day Louisa returned. Scarlet fever had declared itself in the village near which she was staying, and although her friends assured her she would run no risk by remaining, she preferred, as she said, "to take care of herself."

Mr. and Mrs. Webb were engaged to dine with an old friend. They came home early. There were lights in the drawing-room, and when Mrs. Webb asked if her daughter was sitting up for them, she was told that Captain Wenlock was there. It was such a pleasant bit of news that she quite forgot to be surprised that her well-trained Louy should receive gentlemen in her mother's absence.

Mrs. Webb hurried up stairs. For the moment she really forgot the note Janet had left in her charge, and as if he too was in conspiracy against her memory, Henry Wenlock did not ask a single question relative to Janet.

"I have been in Yorkshire since I saw you," he said. "My poor cousin, Lord Fletcher, is struck down by paralysis. He may linger some time, but he cannot recover." Mrs. Webb's ideas were so filled with this news that she sat silent. Then it was possible that in a few weeks or months Henry Wenlock would be Lord Fletcher, and her darling Louy might become Lady Fletcher! The prospect was too dazzling.

Louisa had told Henry Wenlock, as her mother had told her, that her cousin was with Mrs. Dawson, Janet having settled with Mrs. Webb that her journey in search of Mary was not to be mentioned to any one except Henry. He had come direct from the railway station to Vincent Square: he had been there about an hour before Mrs. Webb's return, and when he heard of Janet's absence, he felt so sure that he should find a letter from her at his lodgings that he did not care to ask questions about her from the Webbs.

Lately, if he could possibly avoid it, he never mentioned Janet's name to Mrs. Webb. He stayed a little while talking to Mrs. Webb about his cousin's illness, and then he went away.

Next morning's post brought a letter to Vincent Square, addressed, in Janet's handwriting, to Henry Wenlock. Mrs. Webb was alone in the room when the letters were brought in, and she put this one in her pocket.

"If I am to keep this absurd business a secret from Louy," she said, "I must not let her see the Paris post-mark."

Louy came down to breakfast bright, animated, happy, quite unlike the dull, listless girl of the past two months. She talked incessantly of Henry Wenlock, and of what he had said to her. "He is coming to-night, mamma, to try a new song I have brought from the country: he has such a charming voice;" and then she gave a silly little sentimental sigh and drooped her head gracefully.

"How lovely she is!" thought the fond mother. "No wonder he admires her. There must have been something special in his manner last night, for my Louy is not the sort of girl to fancy a man's admiration when it's all on her own side: dear me, no!"

The day wore on. Louisa's spirits were unflagging, and toward evening she was plainly under the excitement of expectation.

"Poor child!" her mother thought: "I'm afraid she is really attached to him, and yet why should I fear such a thing? Louy would never care really for a man unless he cared for her. Have I not always said that it was only duty that held Henry to Janet? If these two are left to themselves for a week, he must see the fearful sacrifice he is contemplating." And then she stood thinking. Janet's first note lay safely in her desk, and the other letter was still in the pocket of her morning-gown. Must she give them to Henry Wenlock, or should she wait the result of the evening? If he really seemed happy with Louisa, why should she disturb his enjoyment by the mention of Janet?

Mrs. Webb had been deceitful and spiteful and worldly, she had allowed many tall mental weeds to grow unchecked for years, but a deliberate act of dishonesty was new to her. Her conscience spoke out loudly, and she hesitated, and then the evil powers to whose dominion she had yielded with so little struggle spoke out louder still. She stood there hesitating, and as she

hesitated a compromise suggested itself. "I see my way plain now," she said to herself. "I shall put both letters in my pocket: if he asks for them, he shall have them; but there can be no occasion to produce them until he asks about Janet. How can I tell that he has not broken off the engagement? He has not seen Janet since the evening he was so angry with her."

She gave a sigh of relief, and took both letters down stairs with her.

She sat longer than usual with her husband after dinner: even when she heard Henry Wenlock arrive, she did not at once go up stairs.

By the time she reached the drawing-room he was at the pianoforte, trying over new songs with Louisa.

"And really they look so perfectly happy together I have no heart to interrupt them."

She took up her embroidery: Mrs. Webb was indefatigable at all kinds of needlework.

Henry Wenlock came and spoke to her when the song was finished, but he said not one word of Janet. Louisa stayed at the piano, singing. "Won't you come and try some duets?" she said when her song was over.

He was glad to get away from Mrs. Webb. He did not want to speak of Janet. He was both vexed and puzzled about her. It seemed to him that eccentricity might be carried too far, and that her present conduct was inexplicable.

He had called that morning at Mrs. Dawson's, and had learned that she was out of town with Miss Wolferston, but was expected home in a day or two. What could Janet's silence mean? When he reached Vincent Square in the evening, he asked Louisa what had become of Christy, and learned that he had started that morning for the seaside with Thompson.

He felt hurt and depressed; but he loved music passionately, and it was a real pleasure to sing to any one who admired and understood his voice as Louisa did. She was so kind, too, humoring his mood—keeping on singing

and playing, instead of expecting him to talk. He had had no idea how nice she was: hitherto she had seemed to him frivolous and silly, but it was impossible to think this now; and when he bade her "good-night" his eyes were full of gratitude.

"Come again soon and get the last song perfect," she said, in a gentle, earnest voice; and Henry thought what a dear little unselfish girl she was, to devote herself in this way to his improvement.

He was going, when a thought suddenly occurred to him. "Did you forward a letter I wrote to Janet?" he said.

Mrs. Webb flushed slightly: "Yes, I forwarded it."

"Thank you; good-night;" and he went away, leaving his hostess much relieved, and very grateful to have been spared the necessity of producing the letters; for she had decided during the evening that it was plain he had quarreled with Janet: as he asked no questions about her, certainly she might keep her own counsel.

If she had quite understood Henry Wenlock, she would not have feared his questioning. He would have submitted to any torture or doubt or vexation, rather than he would permit Mrs. Webb to see that he was displeased with Janet or ignorant of her movements. He went away more and more perplexed, but he hoped to find a letter at his lodgings. There was no use in any self-torture. He had had a very pleasant evening: Louy was a nice, amiable little girl, and what a charming voice she had!

He reached his lodgings, hurried up stairs, but when he had struck a light there was no letter to be seen. What could it mean, unless Janet had returned that evening?

"I shall go to Mrs. Dawson's again to-morrow, and then if she is not back I shall wait a couple of days. If I have no news by that time, I must make up my mind to cross-question Mrs. Webb. I hope I may be spared this necessity."

CHAPTER LII.

AT MONT DOR.

FOR the first few days Mary gave herself up to passionate sorrow, and then came a sort of resigned sullenness. Her husband did not resent either mood: he wanted the subject of Janet dismissed, and he was resolved not to say a word which might revive it. He had cause enough for anxiety just now, without the unhappy estrangement that had grown up between himself and Mary. Just before his departure from Rookstone the paper which had caused such agitation to Mrs. Wolferston and to Janet had disappeared from the study. He believed that Mary had looked for it at Janet's instigation, and had sent it to her sister; but he believed, too, that his wife had been a mere blind instrument in her sister's hands; and, after all, what harm could an unsigned will do? It was mere valueless rubbish.

He knew well enough he had only to speak out plainly to effect a complete reconciliation with his wife; but if he did this, Mary might repeat the question which had so wounded him. No, he must endeavor to bury the past out of sight without any spoken reference to it.

He wanted Mary's love again as it had been his before her baby's death. He was once more devoted and tender, but her sorrow did not yield as he hoped it would have yielded.

They stayed a week at Fontainebleau, and then he proposed to return to Paris, for he felt sure that if Janet had gone to Normandy in search of them, she would return to England when she failed to find them; but when he made this proposal to Mary, she shrank from the noise and bustle of the great city.

He thought he would try the effect of scenery. He took her to Bourges, with the intention of exploring Auvergne, but Mary found no interest in the quaint old citizen palaces so full of memories of the most disastrous period of French history. Even when they reached Auvergne, the wild picturesque scenery

of that region of extinct volcanoes seemed lost on her.

At times Richard grew impatient of her apathy, but a glance at her sweet face checked him. She was no longer sullen or unloving. There was at times so wistful an anxiety in her eyes that he could scarcely keep from questioning her.

It was a fortnight since they quitted Paris. They were staying at Mont Dor-les-bains. In the morning Mary had been out riding with her husband: they had returned to the hotel, and were just going down stairs to dinner, when she suddenly fainted.

Her husband was terribly alarmed: he had a horror of foreign doctors, and there was no English one to be had. He told his wife, so soon as she was somewhat recovered, that she had over-fatigued herself. She looked at him earnestly: "No, it is not that, Richard. I want to be at home again." He kissed her and soothed her with tender words, but he gave no promise of returning. Later in the day, when they were sitting out in the charming promenade beside the river, she recurred to the subject: "Richard, I cannot stay here. This place is full of beauty, but it oppresses me. All these strange rents and fissures in the mountains—the mountains themselves, with their weird, barren summits and wooded sides—are so unreal, so unlike all I have been used to! If you will not take me to England, let me at least go nearer the coast."

She looked beseechingly at him, but she saw no yielding in his face.

"This is mere waywardness," he said. "So long as you are in France it cannot signify what part of the country you are in. I did not think you so fanciful, darling."

"I think it is more than a fancy, Richard: it is a longing, an impulse, I can no longer resist. You yourself settled to go to Normandy when we left Paris. I see that in more than one Norman town there are English residents, and consequently"—she hesitated, and nervous fear of his anger

checked the words on her tongue, but the overmastering impulse bore her on: "I must say it, dearest, even if you think me foolish: I might find an English clergyman there." He turned away, but she clasped both hands round his arm: he could not break away from her before so many witnesses, she knew, for although the seats were widely separated, there were several of the hotel visitors on the promenade. "Oh, Richard, if you could know how utterly miserable I am, how strangely and awfully my wickedness and weakness have been brought before me during these last days, you would let me go to church again, and I am sure you would wish me to see a clergyman."

He was very angry: she knew that by his frown and his silence. But if Mary had understood human nature better, she would have taken comfort from this very anger: she would have known that where anger is there is inward combat, and she would have thought it a far more healthful and hopeful sign than the cold, sneering cynicism with which Richard had hitherto repressed any earnest feeling in her.

"Come down by the river-side," she said—"we shall be alone there;" and she walked on. He followed her, spite of himself. He was surprised at this new development of his wife's mind: she was no longer the docile child he had married, and yet he felt he loved her more dearly than ever.

"But I am not going to yield to a fit of fanatical enthusiasm," he said: "if Mary once turns canting, all hope of peace between us is over. I'll have no parsons coming preaching reformation to me: not one of them shall ever set foot in my house."

They were all alone again now, close to the bridge, and the frowning summit of the Capucin rock seemed to be bending forward across the river to look at them. Mary stopped, and waited for her husband to come up to her: "Richard, I have not told you all—I could not before those people; but ever since

baby died I have been thinking why he was taken from me, and I know now: it has come to me so clearly, so convincingly, that I am sure it is the truth. He was taken from me for two reasons: one was my great sin, my willful disbelief of my mother's warnings, and then my weakness in giving up all she had taught me; and the other"—the tears rained down so fast that she could no longer see her husband's face—"the other was a mercy sent me taken away: because I had no power to train him rightly, he has been spared from growing as weak and wicked as I am."

Her husband put his arm round her: "You are not wicked, Mary. I will not have you call yourself so; and even supposing you were wicked, had I no part in the child, or have you learned to consider me so great a reprobate that you feel thankful he has had no chance of growing up in my steps?"

She hid her eyes on Richard's shoulder. She knew the answer he expected to this appeal, and yet she could not make it. She only repeated her request to be taken to Normandy.

Suddenly it flashed upon him that she guessed Janet had gone there to look for her, and the suspicion that she was still pining after her sister steeled him against any yielding: "No, Mary, I look upon all this as mere weakness, probably increased by your illness this morning. I shall not take you to Normandy; and even if we were there, don't imagine for an instant that I'll have any cant or nonsense in my house. I am just as I always was; so you have no cause of complaint. If you choose to alter, that is not my business. Come, the damp is rising from the river: you ought to have been indoors long ago."

But Mary had conquered the first, the most difficult part of her request—the speaking it at all: she was not now going to yield hope easily.

"Richard, I must either go back to Rookstone, or you must take me where I shall find a clergyman." He shook his head. "If you will not do either," she said very earnestly, "I must think you are wronging me, and I shall try

to find Janet: I shall write to her to come to me at once."

Richard had to struggle hard for self-control: he had turned round at her words and grasped both her hands in his; but she stood fearless, her lovely blue eyes bent on him full of mingled love and sorrow, and in her whole attitude an expression of earnest purpose he had never seen in her before. He felt instinctively that his anger might frighten her, but that he could exercise no restraining power. "I will never help you to see Janet."

And then he drew her arm into his, and they walked homeward, both of them silent—Mary, because she found no words to urge her petition, so entirely had her pleading exhausted her; and Richard, because he dared not trust himself to speak, lest a few cruel words might shatter the love he had been trying to rebuild during these past days.

Just as they reached one of the quaintly piled-up masses of Roman débris, a French gentleman, who had talked with Richard on the previous day, came up: "Ah, Monsieur Wolfeton, will you do to me a great service? I have here a letter from England on business—important business, monsieur; and I regret to say to you that I cannot arrive to comprehend that properly. If madame will permit—" and, bowing and flourishing his hat about six times more than was necessary, the Frenchman placed himself beside Richard and pulled the letter from his pocket.

"Go on slowly and I will overtake you, Mary."

She moved away: she was so very hopeless, it seemed to her she did not care what became of her.

She had gone on a little way: a man was standing just behind another of the ruin heaps, and she started at coming upon him so suddenly. "It was Leroux."

He had heard of her illness in the morning, and seeing her now turn quite pale, he feared she was going to faint again.

"What is it, madame?"—he raised his hat respectfully—"will you lean against this ruin?"

"No, thank you," she said, faintly; but she stood still—the sudden fright had set her heart beating wildly. "Leroux," she said, for the man stood still also, looking as if he expected her to faint, "when we left Paris, did you leave word that we were going to Normandy?"

"Yes, madame: I had supposed no other thing."

"And do you think if—if you were to go off to Normandy, you would find my sister there?"

Leroux glanced quickly at her: she was very pale, but her eyes glittered with excitement. He shrugged his shoulders and rubbed his white hands: "Ah ça, madame, what will you? I can go to Normandy to-morrow if you will, and perhaps I may find Mees Janet, perhaps not—how can I say it?—but the result will be the same. Monsieur will be angry with me; and do you think, madame, he will let you see mademoiselle, your sister?" Leroux snapped his fingers at such a manifest absurdity. "All monsieur will do, he will run away more fast than ever, and leave mademoiselle plantée là; but, madame, all the same for that: I will go to Normandy and make the search you desire. Never was it said of François Leroux that he refuse for any fear of man to obey the order of a lady."

They had not heard approaching footsteps, and at Leroux's last words Richard stood beside them.

"Stay here till I come back," he said to Leroux; and then, taking his wife's hand and drawing it through his arm, he led her silently to the entrance of the inn and told her to go up to her room at once. Then he went back to Leroux: "You are a spy, I find—an untrustworthy scoundrel: tell me what I owe you, and then don't let me see your face again."

It was well for Leroux that the place they stood in was not unfrequented: all the pent-up anger which Mary had kindled burst its bonds now. The man was scared as he looked in his master's face, but still he could not submit tamely to this insult:

"I am not a scoundrel, Mr. Wolferston. If you had no secrets you would not always be in suspect. A spy! people who have nothing to conceal do not fear spies."

And then he walked away. Something in Richard's eyes warned him he had said enough. In another half hour the Frenchman had received his wages and had departed. He knew that it would be useless to try to see Mary, but he was determined to find her sister without any loss of time.

CHAPTER LIII.

LEROUX'S JOURNEY.

LEROUX started for Paris that night. Till now he had not disliked his master. Mr. Wolferston's altered manner had been sometimes very irritating, but Leroux could have borne unkind treatment better than hard words. It had been derogatory to be called a spy and a scoundrel: it had roused the tiger-blood inherent in some Frenchmen, and he vowed not to rest till he had taken revenge on Richard Wolferston. He was resolved to find Mademoiselle Janet: he was sure she would repay his expenses, still he must not be extravagant. So, after traveling all night, he got a hasty and cheap meal in Paris, and then went on to Rouen, tired as he was. His body was tired, but he had kept his brains awake by occasional cups of strong coffee. It seemed to him that the only way of tracing Janet would be to represent himself as a police emissary, and thus to gain a sight of the visitors' book at the different hotels. He did not find much difficulty in doing this, but he visited three of the principal inns in Rouen, and searched diligently through the arrivals of the past month, without finding any trace of Miss Wolferston. At the fourth hotel he tried a new system. He began to be afraid of identifying himself too much in one character in Rouen—he might draw the observation of the police on him. So when he presented himself at this fourth inn—and as he remarked its quiet, well-to-do appearance he

thought it the most probable of any to afford the information he wanted—he announced himself in search of some friends—English ladies. His notion was, that if Miss Wolferston had followed her sister, she had come abroad alone with Thompson, for he had heard that English young ladies were far more independent than French ones; but still he would not commit himself to the description "a lady and her maid."

At this hotel he asked to see the proprietor himself, and a stout, blue-eyed Norman came out of a little side room into the entrance passage: "English ladies?—we have so many of them, monsieur."

"But these must have been here there is a fortnight: one of them a young lady, not tall, named Wolferston. I am sure that she has been here."

The Norman's bold, bald forehead wrinkled. "English names are neither to be pronounced nor remembered," he said; and then he shrugged his shoulders, and added, "but what will you?"

Leroux paused. He had made up his mind to find traces of Janet here, and the man had not positively affirmed that he knew nothing about her.

"Is her name in your book?" he said. "She would of course write that herself."

"Mais oui," answered the host, with the peculiar Norman twang which is so unmistakable. "Monsieur can accompany me into the salle, and there it is probable we shall find the book."

Leroux could hardly restrain his eagerness while the Norman's fat fingers traveled slowly down the pages: his mercurial Parisian temperament prompted him to look for himself, but he thought it might create suspicion to do this unasked.

"Here is an English name. What barbarous names this people has!" The Norman pointed to Mrs. Dawson's, about halfway down the column he had been examining.

Leroux bent down instantly: it seemed to him magical when just below the name to which the Norman pointed he read that of Janet Wolferston.



PART IX.

CHAPTER LIII.—*Continued.*

"**L**A VOILÀ! it is she!" exclaimed Leroux: "that is exactly the lady that I seek for. Is she here now?"

"We have no one who has been in the house a fortnight," answered the landlord. "I do not remember this lady, but at that period I think our visitors seldom stayed more than a night."

Leroux's eyes had traveled across the page, and he saw that though these names were entered as arriving from Paris, the plate to which they were going was left blank. He was as wise as he was before: he had come to Rouen for nothing but the satisfaction of knowing that Janet had really been there.

The Norman was kind-hearted, spite of his reserve, and the blank disappointment in Leroux's face touched him. "I do not talk to English ladies, monsieur," he said, smiling: "I don't understand their language, and the way they speak French is tiresome to me; but my wife, Madame le Petit, she speaks English, and she likes to speak it, so she always talks all she can to foreigners: I will ask her to speak to you of these ladies."

Madame appeared in a well-fitting black dress and a muslin cap trimmed with blue: she was not pretty, but she had an indescribable charm of manner and appearance which betrayed to Leroux that she came from the capital.

His heart warmed to her at once, and he proceeded to question her about Miss Wolferston: he described Janet's appearance minutely, for Madame le Petit had also shaken her head at the idea that she was likely to remember an English name.

When he came to the description of her face madame's eyes brightened:

"Mais-oui-oui-oui, very certainly yes, monsieur. I have it now: a face and head of cameo—is it not so?—and a small person and blue eyes. Bah! I have been expecting you this long time, monsieur; but I thought you would be English; and, pardon, but you are not the person I imagined mademoiselle meant."

In his utter surprise, Leroux had nearly denied the possibility that Janet had described him, but he had lived a life of too much adventure to be easily thrown off his balance: "Mademoiselle has then mentioned me to you?"

"But yes"—she felt in her pocket—"Bon, I must look in my armoire—it will be put away there. But mademoiselle gave to me a billet for the gentleman which should inquire for her."

A letter! He contented himself with a bow, while madame trotted up stairs again. He dared not speak, for fear of compromising in some way the false character he was representing.

Miss Wolferston had expected a friend and had left a letter for him. Bon! In this letter she would of course have told her friend where she was going: the friend had not come, and Leroux—he plainly had the best right to know Janet's movements when he had so important a secret to communicate to her. The letter was therefore his.

It was rather disconcerting when madame reappeared with a letter in her hand to find that she had mastered the address.

"But this is not for a French gentleman: it is for Monsieur Wenlock."

Leroux's ready wit helped him now: to take his real character would sound more probable than any invention.

"You are right, madame: I am not Monsieur Wenlock, and yet I came for that letter. I am a servant, the gentleman is my master: he is at Dieppe, and he have sent me for Mees Wolferston's letter, that he may know where he is to join her. She is, as you probably have heard, making the voyage of La Normandie to find her sister. She did not find her sister here, did she?"

"No, but she has demanded if a lady of her name have been here—"

"C'est juste—it is that," said Leroux, triumphantly: "her sister is married to her cousin, so they are of the same name."

And then, with a profusion of thanks and bows, he put the letter in his pocket and walked away, before the black-eyed hostess had half tired of talking to him.

"Angélique," said her husband, gravely, "hast thou not given up that letter too easily?"

Madame was thinking so herself, but then it was quite another matter to own to her husband that she had been in the wrong; so she shrugged her shoulders scornfully: "Pierre, go to thy accounts, my angel, and leave me to manage my affairs."

Leroux stepped into the nearest café and opened the letter. In it, as he expected, Janet told Captain Wenlock the next place to which she and Mrs. Dawson were going. He did not quite understand the letter, but still he made out that Captain Wenlock was about to become Miss Wolferston's husband; and it seemed to him that several sentences in it showed that the writer was very anxious to get back to London. "I have no time to lose," he said.

He went back again to Mantes: there he again found a letter, which he appropriated; but at Evreux, the next town to which he was directed, the mistress of the hotel was a Scotchwoman, and she gave him to understand, in broad Glasgow accent which sorely puzzled him, that he was not the person to whom the letter she had in charge was addressed. Here was a dilemma: however, he must calculate Janet's probable

route by the towns she had visited thus far.

For three days and three nights he traveled incessantly. He had the faculty of sleeping as soundly in a railway carriage as in his bed, and although some part of the way had to be accomplished in a diligence, he managed to sleep even in that jolting progress.

At last he found himself, in the early morning, in Caen. He had visited all the large towns of Normandy, and several in Brittany. Once or twice he had again found traces of Janet and her companion, but here he was completely baffled.

Worn-out and disappointed, he turned into an inn to get some refreshment. He ate and drank heartily, and when he had done this, it seemed to him that he must take some repose, he was so utterly overpowered with weariness. He sat at the table dozing while the garçon cleared away the remains of his meal, and when the man asked him if he should bring coffee, he said "Yes," for the excuse of sitting still a little longer. He was soon sound asleep.

Some loud talking roused him. Two English people, a lady and gentleman, had come into the *salle* and were seated opposite to him, waiting for their breakfast.

"It is one of the most absurd notions that can come into any one's head."

"But, my dear," said the wife, fondling her little plump hands, "that is exactly why it might come into Janet Wolferston's. Mrs. Webb tells me she grows more and more eccentric."

"Well, it beats me!" Mr. Buchanan settled his collar, and jingled his knife against a wine-glass to hurry breakfast. "I think twelve mortal hours from Havre to Southampton quite long enough, without enduring three hours beforehand in a wretched little cockleshell of a French steamer. River passage, indeed! I know what the mouth of a river is: the fresh water's uneasy at mixing with the salt, or some rubbish, and the consequence is that everybody else is made extremely uneasy."

"I should not have recognized Janet

if Mrs. Dawson had not waved her hand so vehemently at me. I was just looking round me at the Basin, and all that, and then I said to them—"

Leroux could hardly wait till the round mouth had closed, and then he plied Mrs. Buchanan with questions. All his fatigue had vanished: his veins seemed filled with new fresh blood as he listened to her tidings.

Miss Wolferston was on her way back to England. Mrs. Buchanan told him that she had left Caen at nine o'clock by the "Orne" steamer, bound for Havre, but, to his joy, Leroux remembered that the steamer for Southampton did not start till nearly midnight. If he went to Honfleur by rail, and thence on to Le Havre, he could easily be in time to intercept Janet's return to Southampton, for he did not believe Miss Wolferston would go back to England if she knew her sister was still in France.

CHAPTER LIV.

FOUND.

MRS. DAWSON was tired out. Secretly she felt very wrathful against her companion, but there was something in Janet's earnest, devoted love for her sister, in the uncomplaining patience with which she bore all these repeated disappointments, that subdued her aunt's discontent from much outward expression. "Although I think she might have known her own mind better in regard to time; for as to gowns, I brought but two with me—one on, one off; and with no one to brush or see to me, I'm ashamed to look at myself in the glass with my clothes on, they so stand in dust; not to speak of the unmentionable horrors which, take every care you will, gowns—the skirts of them, I should say—have a habit of contracting in traveling abroad. Oh, dear me! And bonnet strings! I might buy new ones, to be sure—so I might; but then Janet is so on the high stilts, thinking of nothing all day long but Mary, I do believe that if I were to ask her to go into a shop to buy bonnet strings she'd

lose her opinion of me for ever; and if I had 'em I could not sew them on without Mitchell to fix them. I wonder what Mitchell will think when she sees these: they're more like haybands than ribbons—twisted into wisps, and so faded that they are as much like dirty white as lavender. Oh, dear me! it is a comfort to think we shall be at home to-morrow. I say, Janet" (she saw her niece approaching), "aren't you glad we came out here? It was just seeing that said in 'Murray' made me propose it—'Frascati, outside the walls on the seashore.' It is so pleasant, and the young trees are so lovely, and the sea looks beautiful through them: come and sit here, child—the air will do you worlds of good."

They had left Caen that morning, and had reached Havre about twelve o'clock, and had come out to Frascati at once, as Mrs. Dawson declared it impossible to stay in Havre until the departure of the steamer. The weather was warm for the end of April, and it was very pleasant to sit out in the gardens within sight of the sea.

"I've left my tatting in that little room where we breakfasted," said Mrs. Dawson, "or, I should say, where we looked at our breakfast. If ever I trust myself in such another morsel of a boat as that 'Orne' steamer, I deserve to go down in it. Pigs and cows, too! Oh, Janet, it seems a week ago: it was dreadful to feel so ill for nothing. I shall let Mary know some day the list of sufferings I've gone through for her—dear me! dear me!"

Mrs. Dawson went away to find her tatting. Janet sat still looking out over the sea. Had she done all she could? Was she not giving up this search because she could no longer bear Henry's silence, rather than because she had no hope of finding her sister? She did not know. She was ready to give up her own life, her own happiness entirely, if she could bring Mary's husband to confess the truth about the will, and her sister's beseeching words had inspired her with the conviction that Mary too suspected Richard. But though this

conviction and her obedience to her mother's dying words had led her on thus earnestly, Henry's obstinate silence was very hard to bear. For several days after leaving Paris she had not written to him, in the hope that he had returned to London and would follow her when he received the note she had left for him; but when day after day of her fruitless quest passed away, and Henry neither came nor wrote, her heart grew sadly heavy, and it became very hard work to pursue her inquiries with the same zeal with which she had begun them. Had she been alone, it would have been an easier task, but Mrs. Dawson, although very kind, was a wearisome companion from her perpetual questioning.

Besides this, and the weariness of actual fatigue, Janet was heartsick too from constant disappointment. Here and there she had got a glimmer of hope, but this had soon proved fallacious. She had not found decided proof of Mary's presence in any of the towns she had visited. And now, as she sat looking out over the sea, she confessed to herself that she had spent all this time in a fruitless search for Mary, and meantime she had deeply offended Henry. She had written to him twice within the last few days, and had asked him to write to her at Havre, but they had inquired to-day at the post-office without success.

She must go home: she had no right to grieve and wound him thus, and yet in every letter she had asked his sanction to her journey.

She had suspected Richard Wolferston of fraud, but it never occurred to her to suspect Mrs. Webb's honesty in the matter of delivering her own letters to Henry Wenlock. The greatest comfort she could give herself was, that she might have missed his letters on the road.

Once she thought of writing to Mrs. Webb to explain her continued absence and to ask for news, but she could not bring herself to confess to her cousin that she had not received one letter from Henry since her departure. It was over

now: she should be in London to-morrow morning.

A flock of school-girls came trooping back from the beach—happy, bright-faced creatures, who looked as if the genial sunshine flooding the garden and burnishing the widespreading sea into a sheet of trembling gold was their natural element.

Janet sighed as they passed her: they reminded her of Mary,

"I have found you at last, *mademoiselle*!"

Janet started. Leroux was standing beside her: he had come out of the hotel while she sat watching the young girls.

She was too much surprised to speak, and there was no need. Leroux was eager to tell his story: "*Mademoiselle*, I have been following you every day since I leave your sister, and I begin to think you were gone to London, but this morning at Caen I hear certain news, and I have come as fast as possible. *Madame Wolferston* have asked me to go and bring you to her, and I have promised I will do so; and then Mr. *Wolferston* become very angry, and I leave him and madame at *Mont Dordles-Bains*, which is in *Auvergne*, *mademoiselle*—so, so far off; and then I have voyaged day and night too: I never stop till I find you to give you the message of madame."

Janet listened attentively: "Then do you think if we were to leave this place at once I should find my sister at *Mont Dor*?"

Leroux looked at her for a moment with keen disappointment. "*Ma foi!*" he said, to himself, "what egotists are these English! She does not say, 'Thank you a hundred times, *Leroux*,' or, 'What can I do to recompense the zeal and perseverance you have shown?' She but asks for her sister: it is insupportable." Then aloud: "*Ah, mademoiselle*, I do not think it: *monsieur* will at once guess that I shall bear you the message of his wife, and he will travel quickly from *Auvergne*."

"Well, then, what is to be done?" Janet did not say this as if she were

helpless and needed counsel. A look in the Frenchman's face told her he had yet more to communicate.

Leroux bowed : it soothed his wounded self-love to be appealed to : "Mademoiselle will return to Paris, and stay there, and I will watch the railway station for Auvergne. I am sure that Madame Wolferston cannot voyage quickly, and I do not think they will reach the capital before to-morrow ; but, mademoiselle, if I could be sure of seeing you alone and not having some interruption, there is a secret of importance I will confide to you."

It seemed to Janet that already this man had been admitted too freely to the confidence both of herself and her sister. She answered very stiffly : "Anything you have to say can be said here ; but if the secret concerns your late master, I had rather not hear it."

She looked round anxiously for Mrs. Dawson, but the poor lady was still in the sitting-room, seeking her tiny fragment of tatting under a heap of hats and railway rugs. Leroux looked for a moment before he answered. "Mees Wolferston," he said—and a very sarcastic smile curved his moustaches—"you are a very good young lady indeed, and you think all the world like yourself. Bon ! it is pleasant for young ladies to think so ; but, mademoiselle, if you think it is to tell you where is your sister I come all this long way, from Auvergne to Paris, from Paris to Normandie—and, mademoiselle, if I had not this morning found you, I had also gone from Normandie to London—you make a mistake, the most great mistake of your life. No, Mees Wolferston, I have been insult—insult in a manner which is insupportable to my honor"—he tapped his chest vehemently and drew himself to his full height—"and the person who have insult me is not an honest man as I am—no, mademoiselle. He is an impostor, a thief : he has taken to himself the inheritance of others."

"Good gracious me, Janet ! what is all this rhodomontade this man is saying ?"

Leroux had seen Mrs. Dawson coming down the steps of the verandah into the garden, but he felt what he was saying far too deeply to be stopped by any scruple of being overheard. His great fear had been that Janet would rise up and go away before he ended. He gave her no chance of replying to Mrs. Dawson : he pulled a roll of paper out of his pocket, and handed it to Miss Wolferston : "I make no accusation I cannot prove : there is the proof of what I have said." He said this rapidly in French : then he folded his arms as only a Frenchman can, and stood looking at Janet.

She was very pale, for she had at once guessed what it was that she held in her hand—the fatal will which had hastened her mother's death ; but, with all the recollections that crowded back on her, she did not lose her presence of mind, nor her memory of Mr. Painson's words, that Richard Wolferston was not a man to be driven by any publicity to confess the fraud if he had committed it. "Indeed !" she said, quietly. "Aunt Dawson, this person has business to settle with me. You can follow me," she said to Leroux ; and she walked quietly along the garden to a bench opposite the one on which she had been sitting.

CHAPTER LV.

AT CAEN.

"COULD we not stay here another night, Richard ? I feel so weak and tired I am sure it would be best."

"Impossible ! You must not give way, and you will soon feel all right again : we shall not travel for several days after we come to our next resting-place. You were all anxiety to get to Normandy last week." Richard spoke harshly : he had not forgiven his wife's last endeavor to see her sister in spite of him, and yet he longed to be at peace with Mary : he was more unhappy than she was.

Mary looked up at him, and her answer died away unspoken. How ill and changed he was ! In the four days that had passed since Leroux had left

them at Mont Dor her husband had aged years. It seemed to her, as she continued to look earnestly at him, that something had happened to change him very much since he left her half an hour ago.

"Nothing has been unpacked," he said—and while he spoke he put a few small necessities into the traveling-bag—"and therefore we may as well start at once: you will have a much better chance of a good room at Caen by arriving there early."

It was a relief to him that Mary did not answer: he thought she was sullen, but he had no time to soothe her or give any explanation of his sudden haste.

They had reached Paris late on the previous evening, and had left their luggage at the station. Late in the afternoon, when he had gone down to give directions about it, he had passed Janet in the street. She had not seen him—he felt sure of that—but although he had taken the precaution to go to a fresh hotel, it would be unsafe to remain in Paris, and he hastened home to Mary and told her he meant to go on to Caen that evening.

It seemed to him that as Janet had doubtless gone to Normandy in search of them, she would not be likely to return there. He hoped she was on her way to London.

He had heard that Caen was a quiet, clean city, much less frequented by English travelers than Rouen, and that it was very healthy.

He thought of this, of everything he could snatch at, to keep his mind off the one topic, and he succeeded till they were at last fairly on their way to Caen. Then he sank back in a corner of the carriage as weak as if he had just left a sick room. The unexpected shock of seeing Janet's face after all his care and diligence, the suffocating sense of dread with which he remembered that if her eyes had not been turned in another direction she must have seen him, must have known of Mary's presence in Paris, overpowered him, and made him tremble as if an ague fit had passed over him. His hands were cold

and deathlike: it seemed as if faintness were stealing over him.

He roused himself by a sudden effort, slid his hand into his traveling-bag, and pulling out a flask, took a long draught.

Mary saw him do this, and she shuddered. When first she married Richard he had seemed to her abstemious, but lately she had remarked a change: his manner had been strangely variable, rousing from deep gloom to feverish excitement, and she had attributed this to his frequent recourse to stimulants.

He began to recover himself. What a coward he was growing! Why did he not stay and face Janet? And yet he grew pale at the thought, and the troubled suspicion came back to his eyes—the suspicion that had made Mary so unhappy.

On that day when she had repeated to him old Kitty's words spoken in the grassed drive, he had gone into the study and had looked for the will in the davenport. It seemed to him that Mary might have learned more from the old woman than she had repeated, and that she might share Janet's curiosity and try to see it.

He opened the drawer, but the will was not there: he searched for it vainly. How could it have disappeared? The window was still fast: he had bolted it on the night of Janet's visit to the study. The key, he was certain, had never left his own possession: he examined the locks of both the doors, but they did not seem to have been tampered with. He knew not where to seek or whom to suspect.

Janet must have taken the will, and he had hurried away from England to prevent any chance of her again trying to see her sister. Lately he had suspected Mary herself.

In his secret heart he believed his wife had found and kept it; and in this case he was safe so long as he could keep her from Janet. If Janet herself had taken it, she would have put it into Mr. Painson's hands, and the old lawyer would have traced him by this time. If he could only get possession of it once more, he would let the sisters meet:

surely his influence must be stronger with Mary than Janet's could ever be, and life was becoming insupportable without his wife's confiding tenderness.

That night he had strange wild dreams—he talked incoherently. Mary was too ill to sleep, and she trembled at some of his words. What could they mean? Old Kitty's warning came back to her with awful distinctness.

Richard thought she was still sleeping when he left the room next morning.

He was glad of fresh morning sunshine, and, preoccupied as he was, he could not help glancing up and down the street, with its quaint gabled houses nodding at each other from opposite sides of the way, and framing in at one end the double spires of William the Conqueror's famous cathedral grave, and at the other the graceful tapering *flèche* of the beautiful church of St. Pierre.

And yet, though he was glad of the cool refreshing air, no pulse in Richard Wolferston quickened with thankfulness for any of the beauties of Nature or Art on which he gazed.

He was discontented with life, all he had thought most worth having had, like the blackberries the child sees on the hedge-top, dwindled as soon as reached. Was it possession, he asked himself, that tarnished everything? or was it that his idea of happiness and enjoyment was more extensive than the world had power to satisfy? He had come strangely near the truth, and something in this last thought pressed so strongly on his mind that he had to make an effort to get rid of it.

He walked rapidly back to the inn.

The entrance-passage led into a large courtyard, round which ran an open bedroom gallery: a white-capped *femme-de-chambre* was leaning over the balustrade as he came in from the street.

"Monsieur!" she called out, "come here at once—you are wanted."

He rushed up the staircase, and the woman went on before him and opened the door of Mary's room. She lay on the bed white as death.

"What is it, my darling?" he said,

vehemently. "What has happened to you? what have you been doing?" He looked round: the landlady and an old woman were standing near the bed.

"Oh, Richard, are you come?" said Mary, faintly.

The women went away, the elder one warning him to be careful and quiet.

Then he guessed how it was with his wife, and he blamed his own imprudence in exposing her to so much fatigue. She lay so still, so very white, her eyes closed.

She opened them presently: "I have been very ill, darling. Darling"—she tried to speak more earnestly—"there is a curse upon us: we shall never have a living child. Oh, Richard, if you saw the terror I am in at the thought of dying here alone, you would bring a clergyman to see me." The terrified expression in her face shocked him.

"My darling, you are not alone: am I not here?" So helpless a look came on her face that he was cut to the heart. Had it come to this? Even Mary shrank from what she thought his wickedness. He went on hoarsely: "You are not dying, Mary: you cannot while I hold you close to my heart, my darling. I will never speak harshly to you again: you shall be bright and happy as you used to be at Rookstone."

He had clasped her in his arms in a sort of despair, for the hue on her face was death-like. She tried to speak again, but her words came more faintly: "Richard, if you love me, you will do what I ask," and then her eyes closed.

For a moment he thought she was dead, but he felt that her heart was still beating.

At the door he found the landlady and the pitying *femme-de-chambre*, and bidding them stay beside his wife, he hastened to the street in which he had learned the English chaplain lived.

He knocked a long time, and at last a shriveled old man opened the door: "Monsieur Harper is absent: he will not be back for some days—he has been very ill—he is gone to Trouville."

Meantime, Mary had revived: she

asked for her husband, and had been told his errand. The news revived her. Could it be that Richard was changing—that God's mercy was so great that she was to be granted yet another opportunity of leading a new and a better life? Her eyes were strained eagerly on the door when her husband came in.

He saw at once the change for the better in her looks, and he shrank from what he had to tell.

"Is he coming?" she said eagerly.

He was obliged to tell her the truth, and as she listened the light died out of her eyes, the faint tinge of color fled from cheeks and lips, and that look of mysterious terror which had alarmed her husband returned.

"It was not to be: I have put it off too long. I have lived without religion, and I must die without any help."

Her voice grew louder with her excitement. The landlady had left the bedside at Richard's entrance: she came up to him now and touched his arm: "Monsieur, you must get a doctor for madame;" and she whispered, "Do you know how ill she is?"

She did not understand the conversation between this unhappy pair: she thought Mr. Wolferton had gone to fetch a doctor just now, and it seemed to her, instead of that, that he was killing his wife by the evident agitation he had caused by talking to her.

He stood looking at Mary, powerless to speak. The sharp-witted Frenchwoman saw her advantage: she led him out into the gallery, and told him where to find the doctor. Then she slipped back again into Mary's room and locked the door, resolved to keep out as long as possible the imbecile of an Englishman, bent on frightening his wife to death.

Richard hurried down stairs, too overwrought to notice that a vehicle was clattering over the round stones of the courtyard. He was passing out into the street, and he heard his name called, but he only hurried on the faster. It seemed to him as if Mary's life and death hung in the balance, and that on his speed rested the issue.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

IT was Janet's voice that Richard had heard, although he had not recognized it.

Mary's illness had been so sudden, and the women of the hotel had been so constantly in her room, that down stairs it had scarcely been rumored, and when Janet asked to be taken at once to her sister, the garçon led the way along the bed-room gallery and knocked at the door.

Janet had waited to let Mrs. Dawson choose her rooms and left her in them, so that nearly a quarter of an hour had elapsed since Richard's departure before she reached Mary's bed-chamber.

The landlady's scared face when she opened the door frightened her. The woman tried to stop her, but Janet pushed past and went up to the bedside.

"Madame is dead," said the femme-de-chambre, and she wrung her hands sobbing.

Mary looked death-like: the excitement had been succeeded by a sort of senseless stupor, and she lay there as pale and as ghastly as when Richard had first returned.

It was a dreadful shock for Janet, but she did not lose her presence of mind. She sent away the sobbing femme-de-chambre, and then, with the landlady's help, she succeeded in restoring her sister to consciousness.

Mary showed no surprise at seeing Janet, but she signed to her to send the landlady away.

"You must not speak, dearest," Janet whispered, "or I shall have to go too."

There was silence for a while, but a tranquil look had come over the younger sister's face.

"Janet," she whispered, "I shall not get better till I have spoken."

There was such a wistful pleading in her eyes that tears sprang into Janet's: she bent down to listen.

"Janet, I have been very weak and wicked; but it is not only that: it is about Richard I want to speak. I cannot tell you all, but he is quite changed. Since my first baby died he has never

smiled: it seems to me that he has some dreadful secret, or is it that he has left off loving me? Tell me what I must do, Janet, or I shall die: I cannot go on living like this."

"Hush, dearest, or you will be still more ill." And then she did not know how to answer. Mary's words brought terrible confirmation of her own suspicions of Richard, but how could she breathe them to his wife?

"Have you prayed for Richard?" she said, gently.

Mary shook her head. "I dare not," she said, sadly: "besides, Janet, do you think it would be any use? The prayers of such as I am now could not be heard. Pray for me, you, Janet, and pray for Richard too: God will hear you, for you have not forsaken Him."

Tears ran down her pale face. Janet was alarmed, but her sister's imploring eyes constrained her to obey.

She knelt down beside the bed, and prayed aloud fervently for both her sister and her husband.

Richard had not been able to find the doctor: he was sent from one place to another, and finally was obliged to be content with a promise that Monsieur Bouchard should visit his wife so soon as he came home.

"I will go back to Mary," he thought: "if she is not better I must try and find some one else, although this seems the only man of any skill here."

He opened his wife's door very gently: Janet was kneeling by the bed, and he heard her words.

His heart swelled strangely, and tears sprang in his eyes, but he dashed them away and closed the door again.

Janet beside Mary at last! Well, it mattered little now, though he could neither face Janet nor speak to her. It was a relief that Mary was in safe hands—that the responsibility of watching over her no longer rested on him.

The look of her pale, sad face was more than he could bear. He paced up and down the gallery, he took neither rest nor food, but he could not bring himself to re-enter his wife's room.

Mary was growing weaker. At last,

in the afternoon, Dr. Bouchard came. He looked a sensible man, and Janet felt more hopeful when she saw him.

Not for long: he looked at Mary, felt her pulse, asked a few questions, and beckoned Janet to follow him to the door. "Is that the lady's husband I met on the stairs?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, then, it is necessary he should be told: you must tell him that there is no hope of saving his wife: she is dying—I can do nothing."

The doctor hurried away after he had promised, at Janet's earnest request, to return in the evening, and then she was left to obey his orders.

Her own sorrow was as nothing beside the agony she was bid to inflict. For a moment it seemed to Janet as if she could not carry this news to Mary's husband. While she stood at the open door hesitatingly he appeared again at the end of the gallery. She went quickly up to him. She never knew how she forced herself to the task, but in another instant she was holding Richard's unwilling hand between both hers, and repeating to him as tenderly and gently as she could the doctor's words.

He broke away from her before she had ended, and when in an agony of terror she followed him, he was standing beside Mary's bed.

Whether he had agitated his wife by his vehemence, or whether her increasing weakness had tended to this result, could not be known, but Mary sighed deeply, and then sank into so profound an insensibility that no efforts could revive her.

Richard flung himself down on the sofa in a paroxysm of remorse: "I have killed her—both her and her children, for it is their loss that has broken her heart."

Janet tried to soothe and quiet him, but he turned his face away. Presently he burst forth again: "She is taken away from me to punish me: how could such a wretch make her happy?"

And then came dead silence—the silence of suppressed agony, almost as terrible as that other silence which Janet

trembled to think was even now changing into death.

Some few times she tried to moisten Mary's lips: in vain—she was dead to any power of movement.

As the sunlight faded a chilled dreariness filled the silent room. The hours passed on: Richard lay motionless on the sofa. Janet stole across the room to kindle a light. The movement roused Richard. He came up to her and grasped her arm.

"You, at least, are happy: you have no self-reproach," he said. "Janet, if ever she wakens again I will tell you all you want to know. What value do I set on anything if I lose her?"

He left the room abruptly. His words had been so strange and sudden that Janet scarcely realized them. She had a dim consciousness of some great cause for thankfulness, but her heart was too full of deep anxiety for her young sister to comprehend fully what it was that Richard had said to her.

The trance continued: but for a faint pulsation she would have thought that Mary had indeed been taken away.

There was a light tap at the door, and the doctor entered. This time he took far longer in examining his patient. It seemed to Janet as if her own heart stood still. He turned round sharply toward her, and at the change in his face her heart gave a bound that told how strongly hope had lingered in it.

He looked grave, but no longer disturbed. "There has been a great change since I was here," he said: "if madame awakens it will be, I hope, to live; but I do not mean to affirm positively that she will awaken—that depends on the natural strength of constitution—but I think you may hope. I will tell monsieur as I go down stairs."

He said the last words very gently. The delicate-looking English girl—for fatigue and anxiety had robbed Janet of all her bloom—seemed to him far too inexperienced to be in charge of so serious an illness, and also of such an impracticable brother-in-law.

"Monsieur will have another patient soon," said the landlady, when the doc-

tor came out into the gallery again. "The husband of madame has not eaten all day: he only walks always up and down."

"It is not what I should have expected of an Englishman," the doctor answered as Madame Chuquet dutifully attended him to the entrance of the courtyard. "Englishmen keep their feelings to themselves: they never let wives or any one else know they have any feelings."

Janet heard the bed-room door open softly, but she did not look round.

A horrible dread came to her that if Mary's life should be taken, Richard might fall back again into even a more hopeless state.

"But this must be a temptation," she thought. "I am forgetting my darling mother's lessons: surely all trials come direct from our heavenly Father, and will and must bring us nearer to Him if we give ourselves entirely to His guidance." But that "if" was full of doubt and trouble.

The night wore on, sometimes kneeling beside her lifeless sister, the tears streaming hotly on her clasped hands; sometimes bending forward, straining her ears to catch the slightest change in the almost imperceptible breathing. So the early twilight found Janet when it crept in and began to make things visible in the large, tawdrily-furnished room—creeping in its stealthy, steady fashion till it reached even the corners which had been so full of inky blackness. Janet's face looked pale and worn in the gray, cold light: she got up and wrapped a warmer shawl round her. Then, almost unconsciously, her head sank on the pillow beside which she sat, and she slept.

Meanwhile, Richard kept his watch. Up and down, up and down the gallery: long after every footfall had died away in the deserted streets, after even the arrivals by the night train had subsided into repose, he kept pacing up and down.

He could not have slept, even if he had sought another sleeping-room. The thought of life without Mary was the

torture gnawing at his heart. Why had this happened? Why was all joy to be taken from his life? And then he said to himself how little of real happiness there had been in the last few weeks; and the misery had been his making, all his. He went on pacing up and down.

Suddenly came back to him, as from far-off years, the sweet, gentle face of Mary's mother, on that day at Rookstone when she had asked him not to try to win her daughter's love: it came back with awful impressiveness, and with it thoughts of his own past life came, dream-like, in scattered fragments, which mingled, as he tried to piece them together, in hazy, undefined confusion, as the lines of a building in a dissolving view merge into the rigging and spars of a shipwrecked vessel. His own mother came in these memories: he remembered his beatings from her in childhood, and then—slight as the memory was, it yet remained—a shrinking from her incoherent speech and bloated face. Then came school-life—a school where all was stern strictness and prying surveillance, where no act of himself or his comrades was free and uncontrolled, where a boy's word was not held sacred. He remembered how he had rebelled against the constant suspicion and watchfulness, and then how he had found deceit and subservience more useful than resistance. It was in this school, he knew, that he had learned to detest what was called religion and its dry, dull, harsh ways as presented to him; and then again memory grew clouded, and he had a confused vision of a long whitewashed room, with clusters of young heads bent over desks and slates, and texts in large bold type at intervals on the walls. One of these texts stood out clearly, and it seemed to Richard Wolferston to be branding itself on his very heart—he winced under the pain it gave: "If any man cause one of God's little ones to offend, it were better for him that a millstone was cast about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea."

He quickened his walk up and down: the words burned deeper and deeper. He saw them, and yet they were close upon him, whispering into his ears.

CHAPTER LVII.

PERPLEXITY.

AND all this while Henry Wenlock had not received one line from Janet—nothing to explain her strange absence and silence.

On his third visit to Vincent Square he questioned Mrs. Webb. It was a severe mortification to expose to any one so predisposed to judge harshly that Janet had acted wrongly, but still she might possess some clew or she might suggest something. He had called several times at Mrs. Dawson's, and had invariably received the answer, "Mistress is away from home—is expected home in a few days." When he asked where she was traveling he got no satisfaction. Spite of this, he sent two letters to Janet, under cover to Mrs. Dawson, "to be forwarded," and still the silence continued.

He found Mrs. Webb alone in the drawing-room: "Have you heard from Janet? Is she coming home?"

"I know nothing of Janet's movements." Mrs. Webb looked grave and felt uncomfortable. She could not give up those letters to Henry now: they were ten days old.

"But I suppose she told you what her plans were before she started?" He spoke impatiently.

Mrs. Webb looked injured: "Once for all, I really am not answerable for Janet. I suppose she has a right to do as she likes without consulting you or me either: you know she is safe in Mr. Painson's hands. The day you left London, or the next—I'm sure I forget which—Janet went to Mr. Painson, and the next morning, to my surprise, while I was dressing, I saw her arrive here in a cab soon after eight o'clock, and then I think it was the morning after that she went off to France with Mrs. Dawson, and she has not written to me since."

"To France!" exclaimed Wenlock.

"do you mean that Janet has gone abroad without consulting me, and that you have known it and not told me?"

It was necessary to him to vent his anger on some one, and Mrs. Webb knew this, although she affected surprise. "Really," she said, stiffly, "I must refuse to enter into any discussion on the subject. How could I suppose you were ignorant of Janet's movements? You have never asked a question about Janet since she went away, and you must remember that hitherto you have always resented any observations I have thought it my duty to make on Janet's conduct: it seems strange that you should expect me to force the subject on you, and yet now, because I do not at once blame her, you are also displeased. I begin to think lovers are best left to settle their own disputes."

She indulged in her little tittering laugh. He made no answer—he did not know what to say.

"But"—Mrs. Webb had softened her voice till it was almost tender—"there may be a letter at your lodgings. Janet might have been traveling for the first week or so, but within these last few days you surely would have heard from her. Shall I give you the address of the hotel at Paris? That is the only information she gave me about her movements. I forwarded the letter you sent to that hotel."

Henry was still utterly bewildered: "But surely she told you how long she should be away? She must have known I could not spare her just now."

"You mean so near your marriage?" Mrs. Webb looked pityingly at the tall, handsome man, bent, as she thought, on sacrificing himself. "I gave you once before my opinion on the subject of Janet's feelings toward you, and I would rather not recur to that subject. I think now as I thought then. So far as I can remember, Janet simply gave me the address of the hotel, and said she should not stay there very long, but she vouchsafed no further information. Really, I have told you all I know."

This was in answer to the earnest,

searching look he bent on her, and she could meet it fearlessly, for so far she was speaking the truth. Janet had spoken those words: Paris was the place where she hoped to find Mary—she had not counted on going farther when she left Vincent Square.

Wenlock stood thinking a few minutes longer. "Thank you," he said, and he shook hands heartily. "You must excuse me. I am a sad impatient fellow, I know, but there is something about this business which I cannot understand. I won't stay, thank you: I'm best alone to-day."

"Come to-morrow, then," she said, smiling—"come every day, and then if a letter comes here from Janet, you are sure to get it at once."

And Henry Wenlock went away.

Could this woman have been right all through? She had not spoken spitefully just now: she had been disposed to take Janet's part against him. Well, he knew where to write to Janet now, for as she had only given the one address, it was plain she meant to make Paris her head-quarters. He would write to her at once: he had been fooled long enough. He would ask her in plain words whether she wished to become his wife because she loved him, or whether she was only fulfilling her old promise from a sense of duty. And if she said "Yes" to this last question—He paused: he could not answer himself at once. All brightness seemed to fade out of his future: all the hopes and plans of so many, many months clouded suddenly; but he was too angry, too outraged to listen to any regrets. Janet was no longer the Janet he had loved so dearly. What security had he in the love of a woman who obstinately refused him her confidence—who had, as he remembered bitterly now, the very last time they were together, refused to yield her will to his? He would wait the issue of this letter, and if it were that which he feared it would be, he would try to forget the happiness he had promised himself.

The suspense that followed the acting out of this resolution was not easy to

bear. It was a relief to pass his evenings in Vincent Square, and Louisa devoted herself more and more to please him. So far as her frivolous, shallow nature could love, she loved Henry, and the hidden affection gave a soft charm to her manner which won him greatly. He was more and more unhappy and sore-hearted as day after day went on and no answer came to his letter. He had set all feelings of pride aside in writing it: he had poured out the story of his love to Janet, and asked her if she could not and would not return it. Her silence seemed to him worse than a decided refusal would have been. Ah! she had refused him once, as he well remembered now: why had he not taken warning then?

And evening after evening Mrs. Webb watched the pair at the piano growing more and more interested in each other, and she said to herself that if matters went on as favorably for only a few days longer, Janet Wolferston might come home in safety.

CHAPTER LVIII.

AT LAST.

EXHAUSTED, worn-out in mind and body, Richard had lain down at last outside Mary's door, and had sunk at once into a deep, heavy sleep. More than once during his lonely pacing up and down the gallery he had gently looked into the bed-chamber, but he had seen nothing to indicate that any change had come.

In giving him this new hope, the doctor had cautioned him so severely on the danger of any sudden awakening, that Richard had not dared to go up to the bedside even to look at his wife.

It was market-day in Caen, and there were plenty of sounds in the busy street before the household of the Hôtel St. Barbe was stirring: donkey-carts jogging over the stones with their many-colored vegetable cargoes, rosy onions and brilliant orange carrots, and cabbages of many kinds, fringed with tufts of herbs; shrill-voiced women in their snowy skull-caps, with cock's-comb

frill of lace atop—a poor substitute for the time-honored Normandy caps of their grandmothers—were shouting, "Pommes, mes belles, pommes!" as they pushed long trays of shriveled apples along the street.

Mary's room was at the back of the house, so the sounds scarcely reached it; but though Richard lay in the open gallery, he slept on through all till the step of the garçon-de-chambre passed him on his way down stairs. He sprang up in sudden surprise at finding himself where he was, and stared so wildly that the garçon went down and confided to the stable-man, pumping just now in the courtyard, that the English monsieur was mad. Memory soon brought back the past night to Richard Wolferston. He was stiff and sore from lying out there on the hard boards, but yet he felt less wretched than when he had lain himself down on them. He bent his head to listen. All was silent in the bed-room. He opened the door gently and went in. Janet's head lay on the pillow beside her sister's: his entrance had not wakened her. The room was full of light, and he went softly up to the bed and looked at Mary. Her face was still pale, but the painful fixed look had left it. How young and childlike she looked, her dimpled lips just parted by her breathing!

Thoughts, new and earnest thoughts, filled his heart as he looked on this fair young girl, so pure and guiltless, as he told himself, when she had absolutely given herself to him—for good or evil, which? Again he stood thinking. His face grew strangely convulsed: good and evil were battling fiercely. As he stood gazing on the lovely sleeping face the eyes opened gently, and Mary smiled at him and stretched out her hand toward him. The man's whole nature heaved in a mighty struggle, and then he fell down on his knees by the bedside and burst into a passion of tears. The sound roused Janet. It seemed to her she was dreaming: she heard Richard's voice, broken, choked, but still she could make out what he said—"Thank God! thank God!"

The doctor had pronounced himself perfectly satisfied with the state of the patient: he stayed beside her until Madame Chuquet was installed in Janet's place.

"If you do not repose yourself, mademoiselle, you will be ill too," the doctor said.

Janet left the bed-room, but she was not allowed to obey the doctor immediately: she found Richard waiting for her outside the gallery.

"You know what I promised you?" he said. "I am ready to keep my word, but it is quite possible that this new mood may not last. You had better come with me into this room at once: I may change my mind in an hour's time."

There was a bitter unbelief in himself in his words, but it seemed to Janet natural that so proud and reserved a man should wish to hide his real feelings. He led the way into a small sitting-room at the other end of the gallery, and drew forward an easy-chair for Janet. He did not seat himself: he stood leaning against the white-paneled wall, his back to the light, his eyes shaded with one hand.

"I suppose you have heard," he said, "why my father was disinherited, and why, instead of being brought up at Rookstone, I struggled through all the first of my life an orphan and an outcast? Of course you have been told the story: Painson would take care to inform you of it. My grandfather had much to answer for. My father died when I was a boy, and my other parent had never been acknowledged by my relatives, and therefore could not be expected to have any liking for them. I grew up with the belief that Rookstone was mine by right, and that your father kept possession of it knowing it not to be his. He wrote to me, asking me to come to England and claiming me as his cousin, and I accepted his invitation. I was determined to expose his injustice. I had often thought of coming before, but I had to support my mother, and there were reasons why I did not want to bring her to England with me, and I was not rich enough to provide

for her in California; but she had died when Christopher wrote to me. Before I ever saw your father I went to the family solicitor's office: these people had always paid me the income allowed by my grandfather, so I knew all about them. I saw Mr. Painson, and I tell you frankly, Janet, that I have never been able to forgive the way in which he explained to me the reasons for my grandfather's conduct. I irritated him by my suspicions of Christopher, and he did not spare my father's memory. I came out of the office with the full knowledge of my father's errors, and a determined resolution to be revenged on Painson for having made me acquainted with them. I had disliked your father because I considered he had kept me out of my lawful rights: now I hated him because I saw no chance of wresting Rookstone from him.

"When I saw your father, it was impossible not to be friends with him, but still I did not forgive him for occupying my place.

"I soon made up my mind that Mary should be my wife, and if Christy had not come in my way, I should never, I think, have done that which I did do. I discovered your mother's dislike to my attachment. It exasperated me, for I had sounded Christopher and knew he would not oppose it. I had by this time ousted Painson, and had got the management of the property into my hands. Till then I had hardly known how I coveted Rookstone, but the longing grew daily. Your father was too easy, too generous, to improve the property as I wished. I believe I have a special gift that way, and it seemed to me terrible that so much opportunity should be wasted.

"Janet, do you remember one evening when I came down by appointment? It was to take your father's instructions about his will."—He broke off and looked at his listener. She had turned very pale, but she said "Yes" in a firm voice. Her whole soul was wrought up to listen.—"On that evening your mother's manner galled me beyond endurance: when I went into the study with Chris-

topher he asked me if he might tell her the story of my father's disinheritance, and I refused. It had always been kept secret, and I felt indignant with him for wanting to expose this family disgrace to a stranger. My manner annoyed him, and when I left Rookstone next morning it seemed to me that his wife had infected him with her coldness.

"At the end of a week I came to Rookstone again. The last time I walked through the park I had almost cursed little Christy for standing between me and its possession: on this day the very sight of the place tortured me. I came into the saloon filled with evil, rancorous thoughts: your mother was sitting there alone, and, as if the Tempter had set her on to do it, she spoke to me about my love for Mary, telling me she disapproved of my attachment, and wished it ended. Ended! Just as if it was a thing I could take off and put by like a glove—love that had grown into an absorbing passion!

"Now, listen, Janet, for here is the end. The will your father instructed me to prepare was the draft that you, and I believe your mother also, found in Christopher's study. I read it over to him, and then, when he rose up to ring the bell for the servants who came to sign it, I changed it for the one by virtue of which I possess Rookstone.

"Now, you see, perhaps, how I told you the truth when I said the signatures were genuine."

Janet sat still listening, but Richard waited for her to speak. "Yes, I understand," she said at last; "but why did you keep the draft of the will?"

"Why, indeed! I suppose what you would call my good angel had not quite left me even then. I had a sort of notion that I might die before Christy, and die childless after all; and in that case I meant him to know that his father had not intentionally disinherited him. The will left there told no tales, for it was unsigned; but I kept the study fastened, for in the same drawer, if you had looked for it, you would have found a letter in my handwriting with the necessary explanations. Just before I left

Rookstone the will disappeared—the letter I have with me."

He looked at her, she fancied, as if to question her, and she answered at once: "The will was brought to me two days ago."

"Ah!" he said, but he made no further comment.

There was a silence. Richard sat down and covered his face with his hands. The next moment Janet's arms were round his neck and he felt her kisses on his forehead.

"You are my own brother now," she whispered.

"Don't think I have told you this for your sake only." His voice was hoarse and broken. "It seemed to me that unless I confessed all, Mary would be taken away, and I don't care for life without her."

CHAPTER LIX.

PEACE.

HENRY WENLOCK was in a sore and discomfited state of mind. He had given up Janet, or rather she had given him up, for she had not vouchsafed any answer to the letter he had addressed to the Hôtel des Princes; but although he had consoled himself under this bitter sorrow and mortification in listening to Louisa's songs and to Louisa's kind, soothing voice, he had been very much startled this afternoon. He had called much earlier than usual in Vincent Square: Mrs. Webb had written a request that he would do so. She was not at home when he arrived, so he amused himself with Louisa till her mother came in from her walk. At least, he tried to amuse himself, but Louisa had been shy and silent, and when he asked her what was the matter she had burst into tears.

Henry Wenlock was very tender-hearted: he did his best to comfort the frightened, sobbing girl, and while he was still bending over her and she was still sobbing, Mrs. Webb came in. She sent Louisa away, and then asked Captain Wenlock's intentions respecting her daughter.

There is no use in repeating her ingenious words, but she succeeded in convincing him not only that Louisa was hopelessly in love with him, but that he had done his best to win her love. Still, vexed and discomfited as he felt, he had not quite fallen into the snare: he had requested time to think, and he was doing this now.

Janet could never be his wife. He still sometimes cherished a hope that the letters had not reached her, but even this did not comfort him: she could have written to him. It was true that the terrible doubt of Janet's love—the doubt which had tormented him ever since she refused to become his wife—was now a sad certainty: reunion had shown her that he was not that which, during their long separation, she had imagined him to be: she loved him no longer, and she had resolved not to marry him.

"But even then"—the poor fellow clasped both hands together and bowed his head on them—"supposing she had grown to despise me, she must be strangely changed. Janet, as I believe in her, would have faced me and told me nobly her change of feeling: she would have blamed herself for it. She would not have gone away without a word: even if she could not love me, she would have thought of my suffering—she would have blamed herself wholly." He started up impatiently. "I cannot believe it, and I will not. If Janet has so acted now, she must have been false throughout. I could not have been fooled except by a very artful woman; and if Janet is not true, then I believe the whole world, and everything in it, is one great falsehood."

He decided that he could not write to Mrs. Webb. To-morrow his brains would be clearer: he should be able to see things more as they really were. But it was still early: he could not stay indoors brooding over his manifold perplexities.

A tap at his door, and his landlady came in: "A note for you, sir: the lady would not give it to the servant—she asked me to bring it to you myself."

Henry's first thought was of Mrs. Webb. He opened the note indignantly, then his eyes fastened on the writing with almost delirious joy. He looked at the woman.

"The lady is waiting, sir, in a carriage: there are two ladies."

In an instant he was running down stairs, and before Mrs. Dawson had time to utter the elaborate invitation she had prepared, Henry Wenlock had handed Janet out, and told her astonished aunt that he would bring her home safely in half an hour.

At first he asked Janet no questions, and even when she began her explanations, he seemed to think them superfluous. "Now I have you again safe, my darling, it does not matter how I lost you," he said, in the fullness of his joy. But when a few questions and answers had passed, it was plain to them both that Janet could not return to Vincent Square. Wenlock insisted at first on exposing Mrs. Webb's treachery, but Janet's persuasion prevailed: he consented to a dignified silence, on condition that Janet gave up all intimacy with the Webbs.

He took Janet back to Mrs. Dawson, and spent the rest of the day with her.

"Remember," he said, as they parted, "next Tuesday I shall claim you as my wife, just as if this journey had not come between; and if the gowns are not all ready, that is no fault of mine." And the wedding was on the day fixed so long beforehand.

Janet, after a few weeks' absence, took possession of her own home, and on the morning after her return she received a visit from Thompson.

"If you please, ma'am, at least"—the woman blushed and simpered—"I've changed my name: it's not Thompson now—I am Madame Leroux."

"You have married that Frenchman?" and Mrs. Wenlock looked disturbed—as well she might, in thinking of the character of the man. But she hesitated to express depreciation of a husband to a newly-married wife.

"Well, ma'am"—the dressmaker

bridled—"I'm partial to foreigners; and you see, ma'am, Alphonse—Monsieur Leroux, I mean—wouldn't take *no* as an answer, for of course, Miss Wolferston—I beg pardon, Mrs. Wenlock I meant, to be sure—I did not say yes at once; dear me! no, ma'am. And then my partner, Miss Briggs, she said 'Madame' would look so well on the door-plate, and so help the business; so you see, ma'am"—here Madame Leroux smiled: she was satisfied with the way she had made out her case—"there was no help for it."

Janet smiled too: "Well, I hope you will be very happy. I think you will have a kind husband. Monsieur Leroux was helpful to me when I was in France. I do not think I should

have found Mrs. Wolferston without him."

"So he says, ma'am;" and Madame Leroux curtsied and went her way.

Janet never kept another secret from her husband, and to judge by the way in which she defers to his slightest wish, no one would guess she had ever merited the reproach of being "strong-minded and self-willed."

Christy is master of Rookstone now, for Richard Wolferston at once relinquished all right to it. He and Mary live in a far-off country. They are no longer rich, and they are still childless. But they are more truly happy than they ever were when they were the possessors of Rookstone.



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